

THE EARTHLY
PARADISE: A POEM
BY WILLIAM MORRIS

PART IV

THE STORY OF CUPID AND PSYCHE
THE WRITING ON THE IMAGE

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THE EARTHLY PARADISE

MAY

O LOVE, this morn when the sweet nightingale
Had so long finished all he had to say,
That thou hadst slept, and sleep had told his tale ;
And midst a peaceful dream had stolen away
In fragrant dawning of the first of May,
Didst thou see aught ? didst thou hear voices sing
Ere to the risen sun the bells 'gan ring ?

For then methought the Lord of Love went by
To take possession of his flowery throne,
Ringed round with maids, and youths, and minstrelsy
A little while I sighed to find him gone,
A little while the dawning was alone,
And the light gathered ; then I held my breath,
And shuddered at the sight of Eld and Death.

Alas ! Love passed me in the twilight dun,
His music hushed the wakening ousel's song ;
But on these twain shone out the golden sun,
And o'er their heads the brown bird's tune was strong
As shivering, twixt the trees they stole along ;
None noted aught their noiseless passing by,
The world had quite forgotten it must die.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

NOW must these men be glad a little while
That they had lived to see May once more smile
Upon the earth; wherefore, as men who know
How fast the bad days and the good days go,
They gathered at the feast: the fair abode
Wherein they sat, o'erlooked, across the road,
Unhedged green meads, which willow streams passed
through,

And on that morn, before the fresh May dew
Had dried upon the sunniest spot of grass,
From bush to bush did youths and maidens pass
In raiment meet for May apparelled,
Gathering the milk-white blossoms and the red;
And now, with noon long past, and that bright day
Growing weary, on the sunny way
They wandered, crowned with flowers, and loitering,
And weary, yet were fresh enough to sing
The carols of the morn, and pensive, still
Had cast away their doubt of death and ill,
And flushed with love, no more grew red with shame.

So to the elders as they sat, there came,
With scent of flowers, the murmur of that folk
Wherethrough from time to time a song outbroke,
Till scarce they thought about the story due;
Yet, when anigh to sun-setting it grew,

MAY

A book upon the board an elder laid,
And turning from the open window said,
"Too fair a tale the lovely time doth ask,
For this of mine to be an easy task,
Yet in what words soever this is writ,
As for the matter, I dare say of it
That it is lovely as the lovely May ;
Pass then the manner, since the learned say
No written record was there of the tale,
Ere we from our fair land of Greece set sail ;
How this may be I know not, this I know
That such-like tales the wind would seem to blow
From place to place, e'en as the feathery seed
Is borne across the sea to help the need
Of barren isles ; so, sirs, from seed thus sown,
This flower, a gift from other lands has grown.

THE STORY OF CUPID AND PSYCHE

ARGUMENT

PSYCHE, a king's daughter, by her exceeding beauty caused the people to forget Venus; therefore the goddess would fain have destroyed her: nevertheless she became the bride of Love, yet in an unhappy moment lost him by her own fault, and wandering through the world suffered many evils at the hands of Venus, for whom she must accomplish fearful tasks. But the gods and all nature helped her, and in process of time she was reunited to Love, forgiven by Venus, and made immortal by the Father of gods and men.

IN the Greek land of old there was a King
Happy in battle, rich in everything;
Most rich in this, that he a daughter had
Whose beauty made the longing city glad.
She was so fair, that strangers from the sea
Just landed, in the temples thought that she
Was Venus visible to mortal eyes,
New come from Cyprus for a world's surprise.
She was so beautiful that had she stood
On windy Ida by the oaken wood,
And bared her limbs to that bold shepherd's gaze,
Troy might have stood till now with happy days;
And those three fairest, all have left the land
And left her with the apple in her hand.

CUPID AND PSYCHE

And Psyche is her name in stories old,
As ever by our fathers we were told.

All this beheld Queen Venus from her throne,
And felt that she no longer was alone
In beauty, but, if only for a while,
This maiden matched her god-enticing smile ;
Therefore, she wrought in such a wise, that she,
If honoured as a goddess, certainly
Was dreaded as a goddess none the less,
And midst her wealth, dwelt long in loneliness.

Two sisters had she, and men deemed them fair,
But as King's daughters might be anywhere,
And these to men of name and great estate
Were wedded, while at home must Psyche wait.
The sons of kings before her silver feet
Still bowed, and sighed for her ; in measures sweet
The minstrels to the people sung her praise,
Yet must she live a virgin all her days.

So to Apollo's fane her father sent,
Seeking to know the dreadful Gods' intent,
And therewith sent he goodly gifts of price,
A silken veil, wrought with a paradise,
Three golden bowls, set round with many a gem,
Three silver robes, with gold in every hem,
And a fair ivory image of the god
That underfoot a golden serpent trod ;
And when three lords with these were gone away,
Nor could return until the fortieth day,
Ill was the King at ease, and neither took

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Joy in the chase, or in the pictured book
The skilled Athenian limner had just wrought,
Nor in the golden cloths from India brought.

At last the day came for those lords' return,
And then 'twixt hope and fear the King did burn,
As on his throne with great pomp he was set,
And by him Psyche, knowing not as yet
Why they had gone: thus waiting, at noontide
They in the palace heard a voice outside,
And soon the messengers came hurrying,
And with pale faces knelt before the King,
And rent their clothes, and each man on his head
Cast dust, the while a trembling courtier read
This scroll, wherein the fearful answer lay,
Whereat from every face joy passed away.

THE ORACLE

O FATHER of a most unhappy maid,
O King, whom all the world henceforth shall know
As wretched among wretches, be afraid
To ask the gods thy misery to show,
But if thou needs must hear it, to thy woe,
Take back thy gifts to feast thine eyes upon,
When thine own flesh and blood some beast hath won.

"For hear thy doom, a rugged rock there is
Set back a league from thine own palace fair,
There leave the maid, that she may wait the kiss

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Of the fell monster that doth harbour there :
This is the mate for whom her yellow hair
And tender limbs have been so fashioned,
This is the pillow for her lovely head.

“O what an evil from thy loins shall spring,
For all the world this monster overturns,
He is the bane of every mortal thing,
And this world ruined, still for more he yearns ;
A fire there goeth from his mouth that burns
Worse than the flame of Phlegethon the red—
To such a monster shall thy maid be wed.

“And if thou sparest now to do this thing,
I will destroy thee and thy land also,
And of dead corpses shalt thou be the King,
And stumbling through the dark land shalt thou go,
Howling for second death to end thy woe ;
Live therefore as thou mayst and do my will,
And be a King that men may envy still.”

What man was there, whose face changed not for grief
At hearing this? Psyche, shrunk like the leaf
The autumn frost first touches on the tree,
Stared round about with eyes that could not see,
And muttered sounds from lips that said no word,
And still within her ears the sentence heard
When all was said and silence fell on all
’Twixt marble columns and adorned wall.

Then spoke the King, bowed down with misery :
“What help is left! O daughter, let us die,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Or else together fleeing from this land,
From town to town go wandering hand in hand
Thou and I, daughter, till all men forget
That ever on a throne I have been set,
And then, when houseless and disconsolate,
We ask an alms before some city gate,
The gods perchance a little gift may give,
And suffer thee and me like beasts to live."

Then answered Psyche, through her bitter tears,
"Alas! my father, I have known these years
That with some woe the gods have dowered me,
And weighed 'gainst riches infelicity;
Ill is it then against the gods to strive;
Live on, O father, those that are alive
May still be happy; would it profit me
To live awhile, and ere I died to see
Thee perish, and all folk who love me well,
And then at last be dragged myself to hell
Cursed of all men? nay, since all things must die,
And I have dreamed not of eternity,
Why weepest thou that I must die to-day?
Why weepest thou? cast thought of shame away,
The dead are not ashamed, they feel no pain;
I have heard folk who spoke of death as gain—
And yet—ah, God, if I had been some maid,
Toiling all day, and in the night-time laid
Asleep on rushes—had I only died
Before this sweet life I had fully tried,
Upon that day when for my birth men sung,
And o'er the feasting folk the sweet bells rung."

CUPID AND PSYCHE

And therewith she arose and gat away,
And in her chamber, mourning long she lay,
Thinking of all the days that might have been,
And how that she was born to be a queen,
The prize of some great conqueror of renown,
The joy of many a country and fair town,
The high desire of every prince and lord,
One who could fright with careless smile or word
The hearts of heroes fearless in the war,
The glory of the world, the leading-star
Unto all honour and all earthly fame—
—Round goes the wheel, and death and deadly shame
Shall be her lot, while yet of her men sing
Unwitting that the gods have done this thing.
Long time she lay there, while the sunbeams moved
Over her body through the flowers she loved ;
And in the eaves the sparrows chirped outside,
Until for weariness she grew dry-eyed,
And into an unhappy sleep she fell.

But of the luckless King now must we tell,
Who sat devising means to 'scape that shame,
Until the frightened people thronging came
About the palace, and drove back the guards,
Making their way past all the gates and wards ;
And, putting chamberlains and marshals by,
Surged round the very throne tumultuously.
Then knew the wretched King all folk had heard
The miserable sentence, and the word
The gods had spoken ; and from out his seat
He rose, and spoke in humble words, unmeet

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

For a great King, and prayed them give him grace,
While 'twixt his words the tears ran down his face
On to his raiment stiff with golden thread.

But little heeded they the words he said,
For very fear had made them pitiless ;
Nor cared they for the maid and her distress,
But clashed their spears together and 'gan cry :
“For one man's daughter shall the people die,
And this fair land become an empty name,
Because thou art afraid to meet the shame
Wherewith the gods reward thy hidden sin ?
Nay, by their glory do us right herein ! ”

“Ye are in haste to have a poor maid slain,”
The King said ; “but my will herein is vain,
For ye are many, I one aged man :
Let one man speak, if for his shame he can.”

Then stepped a sturdy dyer forth, who said,—
“Fear of the gods brings no shame, by my head.
Listen ; thy daughter we would have thee leave
Upon the fated mountain this same eve ;
And thither must she go right well arrayed
In marriage raiment, loose hair as a maid,
And saffron veil, and with her shall there go
Fair maidens bearing torches, two and two ;
And minstrels, in such raiment as is meet
The god-ordained fearful spouse to greet.
So shalt thou save our wives and little ones,
And something better than a heap of stones,
Dwelt in by noisome things, this town shall be,
And thou thyself shalt keep thy sovereignty ;
But if thou wilt not do the thing I say,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Then shalt thou live in bonds from this same day,
And we will bear thy maid unto the hill,
And from the dread gods save the city still."

Then loud they shouted at the words he said,
And round the head of the unhappy maid,
Dreaming uneasily of long-past joys,
Floated the echo of that dreadful noise,
And changed her dreams to dreams of misery.
But when the King knew that the thing must be,
And that no help there was in this distress,
He bade them have all things in readiness
To take the maiden out at sun-setting,
And wed her to the unknown dreadful thing.
So through the palace passed with heavy cheer
Her women gathering the sad wedding gear ;
Who lingering long, yet at the last must go,
To waken Psyche to her bitter woe.
So coming to her bower, they found her there,
From head to foot rolled in her yellow hair,
As in the saffron veil she should be soon
Betwixt the setting sun and rising moon ;
But when above her a pale maiden bent
And touched her, from her heart a sigh she sent,
And waking, on their woeful faces stared,
Sitting upright, with one white shoulder bared
By writhing on the bed in wretchedness.
Then suddenly remembering her distress,
She bowed her head and 'gan to weep and wail,
But let them wrap her in the bridal veil,
And bind the sandals to her silver feet,
And set the rose-wreath on her tresses sweet ;

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But spoke no word, yea, rather, wearily,
Turned from the yearning face and pitying eye
Of any maid who seemed about to speak.

Now through the garden trees the sun 'gan break,
And that inevitable time drew near ;
Then through the courts, grown cruel, strange, and drear,
Since the bright morn, they led her to the gate,
Where she beheld a golden litter wait,
Whereby the King stood, aged and bent to earth,
The flute-players with faces void of mirth,
The down-cast bearers of the ivory wands,
The maiden torch-bearers' unhappy bands.

So then was Psyche taken to the hill,
And through the town the streets were void and still ;
For in their houses all the people stayed,
Of that most mournful music sore afraid.
But on the way a marvel did they see,
For, passing by, where wrought of ivory,
There stood the Goddess of the flowery isle,
All folk could see the carven image smile.

But when anigh the hill's bare top they came,
Where Psyche must be left to meet her shame,
They set the litter down, and drew aside
The golden curtains from the wretched bride,
Who at their bidding rose and with them went
Afoot amidst her maids with head down-bent,
Until they came unto the drear rock's brow ;
And there she stood apart, not weeping now,
But pale as privet blossom is in June.
There as the quivering flutes left off their tune,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

In trembling arms the weeping, haggard King
Caught Psyche, who, like some half-lifeless thing,
Took all his kisses, and no word could say,
Until at last perforce he turned away ;
Because the longest agony has end,
And homeward through the twilight did they wend.

But Psyche, now faint and bewildered,
Remembered little of her pain and dread ;
Her doom drawn nigh took all her fear away,
And left her faint and weary ; as they say
It haps to one who 'neath a lion lies,
Who stunned and helpless feels not ere he dies
The horror of the yellow fell, the red
Hot mouth, and white teeth gleaming o'er his head :
So Psyche felt, as sinking on the ground -
She cast one weary vacant look around,
And at the ending of that wretched day
Swooning beneath the risen moon she lay.

NOW backward must our story go awhile
And unto Cyprus the fair flowered isle,
Where hid away from every worshipper
Was Venus sitting, and her son by her
Standing to mark what words she had to say,
While in his dreadful wings the wind did play :
Frowning she spoke, in plucking from her thigh
The fragrant flowers that clasped it lovingly.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

“In such a town, O son, a maid there is
Whom any amorous man this day would kiss
As gladly as a goddess like to me,
And though I know an end to this must be,
When white and red and gold are waxen grey
Down on the earth, while unto me one day
Is as another; yet behold, my son,
And go through all my temples one by one
And look what incense rises unto me;
Hearken the talk of sailors from the sea
Just landed, ever will it be the same,
‘Hast thou then seen her?’—Yea, unto my shame
Within the temple that is called mine,
As through the veil I watched the altar shine
This happed; a man with outstretched hand there stood,
Glittering in arms, of smiling joyous mood,
With crisp, black hair, and such a face one sees
But seldom now, and limbs like Hercules;
But as he stood there in my holy place,
Across mine image came the maiden’s face,
And when he saw her, straight the warrior said,
Turning about unto an earthly maid,
‘O, lady Venus, thou art kind to me
After so much of wandering on the sea
To show thy very body to me here,’
But when this impious saying I did hear,
I sent them a great portent, for straightway
I quenched the fire, and no priest on that day
Could light it any more for all his prayer.
“So must she fall, so must her golden hair
Flash no more through the city, or her feet

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Be seen like lilies moving down the street ;
No more must men watch her soft raiment cling
About her limbs, no more must minstrels sing
The praises of her arms and hidden breast.
And thou it is, my son, must give me rest
From all this worship wearisomely paid
Unto a mortal who should be afraid
To match the gods in beauty ; take thy bow
And dreadful arrows, and about her sow
The seeds of folly, and with such an one
I pray thee cause her mingle, fair my son,
That not the poorest peasant girl in Greece
Would look on for the gift of Jason's fleece.
Do this, and see thy mother glad again,
And free from insult, in her temples reign
Over the hearts of lovers in the spring."

"Mother," he said, "thou askest no great thing,
Some wretch too bad for death I soon shall find,
Who round her perfect neck his arms shall wind.
She shall be driven from the palace gate
Where once her crowd of worshippers would wait
From earliest morning till the dew was dry
On chance of seeing her gold gown glancing by ;
There through the storm of curses shall she go
In evil raiment midst the winter snow,
Or in the summer in rough sheepskins clad.
And thus, O mother, shall I make thee glad
Remembering all the honour thou hast brought
Unto mine altars ; since as thine own thought
My thought is grown, my mind as thy dear mind."

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then straight he rose from earth and down the wind
Went glittering 'twixt the blue sky and the sea,
And so unto the place came presently
Where Psyche dwelt, and through the gardens fair
Passed seeking her, and as he wandered there
Had still no thought but to do all her will,
Nor cared to think if it were good or ill :
So beautiful and pitiless he went,
And toward him still the blossomed fruit-trees leant,
And after him the wind crept murmuring,
And on the boughs the birds forgot to sing.

Withal at last amidst a fair green close,
Hedged round about with woodbine and red rose,
Within the flicker of a white-thorn shade
In gentle sleep he found the maiden laid.
One hand that held a book had fallen away
Across her body, and the other lay
Upon a marble fountain's plashing rim,
Among whose broken waves the fish showed dim,
But yet its wide-flung spray now woke her not,
Because the summer day at noon was hot,
And all sweet sounds and scents were lulling her.

So soon the rustle of his wings 'gan stir
Her looser folds of raiment, and the hair
Spread wide upon the grass and daisies fair,
As Love cast down his eyes with a half smile
Godlike and cruel ; that faded in a while,
And long he stood above her hidden eyes
With red lips parted in a god's surprise.

Then very Love knelt down beside the maid

CUPID AND PSYCHE

And on her breast a hand unfelt he laid,
And drew the gown from off her dainty feet,
And set his fair cheek to her shoulder sweet,
And kissed her lips that knew of no love yet,
And wondered if his heart would e'er forget
The perfect arm that o'er her body lay.

But now by chance a damsel came that way,
One of her ladies, and saw not the god,
Yet on his shafts cast down had well-nigh trod
In wakening Psyche, who rose up in haste
And girded up her gown about her waist,
And with that maid went drowsily away.

From place to place Love followed her that day
And ever fairer to his eyes she grew,
So that at last when from her bower he flew,
And underneath his feet the moonlit sea
Went shepherding his waves disorderly,
He swore that of all gods and men, no one
Should hold her in his arms but he alone ;
That she should dwell with him in glorious wise
Like to a goddess in some paradise ;
Yea, he would get from Father Jove this grace
That she should never die, but her sweet face
And wonderful fair body should endure
Till the foundations of the mountains sure
Were molten in the sea ; so utterly
Did he forget his mother's cruelty.

And now that he might come to this fair end,
He found Apollo, and besought him lend

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

His throne of divination for a while,
Whereby he did the priestess there beguile,
To give the cruel answer ye have heard
Unto those lords, who wrote it word by word,
And back unto the King its threatenings bore,
Whereof there came that grief and mourning sore,
Of which ye wot ; thereby is Psyche laid
Upon the mountain-top ; thereby, afraid
Of some ill yet, within the city fair
Cower down the people that have sent her there.

Withal did Love call unto him the Wind
Called Zephyrus, who most was to his mind,
And said, " O rainy wooer of the spring,
I pray thee, do for me an easy thing ;
To such a hill-top go, O gentle Wind,
And there a sleeping maiden shalt thou find ;
Her perfect body in thine arms with care
Take up, and unto the green valley bear
That lies before my noble house of gold ;
There leave her lying on the daisies cold."

Then, smiling, toward the place the fair Wind
While 'neath his wing the sleeping lilies bent,
And flying 'twixt the green earth and the sea,
Made the huge anchored ships dance merrily,
And swung round from the east the gilded vanes
On many a palace, and from unhorsed wains
Twitched off the wheat-straw in his hurried flight ;
But ere much time had passed he came in sight
Of Psyche laid in swoon upon the hill,
And smiling, set himself to do Love's will ;

CUPID AND PSYCHE

For in his arms he took her up with care,
Wondering to see a mortal made so fair,
And came into the vale in little space,
And set her down in the most flowery place;
And then unto the plains of Thessaly
Went ruffling up the edges of the sea.

Now underneath the world the moon was gone,
But brighter shone the stars so left alone,
Until a faint green light began to show
Far in the east, whereby did all men know,
Who lay awake either with joy or pain,
That day was coming on their heads again;
Then widening, soon it spread to grey twilight,
And in a while with gold the east was bright;
The birds burst out a-singing one by one,
And o'er the hill-top rose the mighty sun.

Therewith did Psyche open wide her eyes,
And rising on her arm, with great surprise
Gazed on the flowers wherein so deep she lay,
And wondered why upon that dawn of day
Out in the fields she had lift up her head
Rather than in her balmy gold-hung bed.
Then, suddenly remembering all her woes,
She sprang upon her feet, and yet arose
Within her heart a mingled hope and dread
Of some new thing: and now she raised her head,
And gazing round about her timidly,
A lovely grassy valley could she see,
That steep grey cliffs upon three sides did bound,
And under these, a river sweeping round,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

With gleaming curves the valley did embrace,
And seemed to make an island of that place ;
And all about were dotted leafy trees,
The elm for shade, the linden for the bees,
The noble oak, long ready for the steel
Which in that place it had no fear to feel ;
The pomegranate, the apple, and the pear,
That fruit and flowers at once made shift to bear,
Nor yet decayed therefor, and in them hung
Bright birds that elsewhere sing not, but here sung
As sweetly as the small brown nightingales
Within the wooded, deep Laconian vales.

But right across the vale, from side to side,
A high white wall all further view did hide,
But that above it, vane and pinnacle
Rose up, of some great house beyond to tell,
And still betwixt these, mountains far away
Against the sky rose shadowy, cold, and grey.

She, standing in the yellow morning sun,
Could scarcely think her happy life was done,
Or that the place was made for misery ;
Yea, some lone heaven it rather seemed to be,
Which for the coming band of gods did wait ;
Hope touched her heart ; no longer desolate,
Deserted of all creatures did she feel,
And o'er her face sweet colour 'gan to steal,
That deepened to a flush, as wandering thought
Desires before unknown unto her brought,
So mighty was the God, though far away.

But trembling midst her hope, she took her way

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Unto a little door midmost the wall,
And still on odorous flowers her feet did fall,
And round about her did the strange birds sing,
Praising her beauty in their carolling.
Thus coming to the door, when now her hand
First touched the lock, in doubt she needs must stand,
And to herself she said, "Lo, here the trap!
And yet, alas! whatever now may hap,
How can I 'scape the ill which waiteth me?
Let me die now!" and herewith, tremblingly,
She raised the latch, and her sweet sinless eyes
Beheld a garden like a paradise,
Void of mankind, fairer than words can say,
Wherein did joyous harmless creatures play
After their kind, and all amidst the trees
Were strange-wrought founts and wondrous images;
And glimmering 'twixt the boughs could she behold
A house made beautiful with beaten gold,
Whose open doors in the bright sun did gleam;
Lonely, but not deserted did it seem.

Long time she stood debating what to do,
But at the last she passed the wicket through,
Which, shutting clamorously behind her, sent
A pang of fear throughout her as she went;
But when through all that green place she had passed,
And by the palace porch she stood at last,
And saw how wonderfully the wall was wrought,
With curious stones from far-off countries brought,
And many an image and fair history
Of what the world has been, and yet shall be,
And all set round with golden craftsmanship,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Well-wrought as some renowned cup's royal lip,
She had a thought again to turn aside:
And yet again, not knowing where to bide,
She entered softly, and with trembling hands
Holding her gown; the wonder of all lands
Met there the wonders of the land and sea.

Now went she through the chambers tremblingly,
And oft in going would she pause and stand,
And drop the gathered raiment from her hand,
Still the beating of her heart for fear
As voices whispering low she seemed to hear,
But then again the wind it seemed to be
Moving the golden hangings doubtfully,
Or some bewildered swallow passing close
Unto the pane, or some wind-beaten rose.

Soon seeing that no evil thing came near,
A little she began to lose her fear,
And gaze upon the wonders of the place,
And in the silver mirrors saw her face
Grown strange to her amidst that loneliness,
And stooped to feel the web her feet did press,
Wrought by the brown slim-fingered Indian's toil
Amidst the years of war and vain turmoil;
Or she the figures of the hangings felt,
Or daintily the unknown blossoms smelt,
Or stood and pondered what new thing might mean
The images of knight and king and queen
Wherewith the walls were pictured here and there,
Or touched rich vessels with her fingers fair,
And o'er her delicate smooth cheek would pass

CUPID AND PSYCHE

The long-fixed bubbles of strange works of glass :
So wandered she amidst these marvels new
Until anigh the noontide now it grew.

At last she came unto a chamber cool
Paved cunningly in manner of a pool,
Where red fish seemed to swim through floating weed,
And at the first she thought it so indeed,
And took the sandals quickly from her feet,
But when the glassy floor these did but meet
The shadow of a long-forgotten smile
Her anxious face a moment did beguile;
And crossing o'er, she found a table spread
With dainty food, as delicate white bread
And fruits piled up and covered savoury meat,
As though a king were coming there to eat,
For the worst vessel was of beaten gold.

Now when these dainties Psyche did behold
She fain had eaten, but did nowise dare,
Thinking she saw a god's feast lying there.
But as she turned to go the way she came
She heard a low soft voice call out her name,
Then she stood still, and trembling gazed around,
And seeing no man, nigh sank upon the ground,
Then through the empty air she heard the voice.

"O, lovely one, fear not! rather rejoice
That thou art come unto thy sovereignty:
Sit now and eat, this feast is but for thee,
Yea, do whatso thou wilt with all things here,
And in thine own house cast away thy fear,
For all is thine, and little things are these

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

So loved a heart as thine, awhile to please.

“Be patient! thou art loved by such an one
As will not leave thee mourning here alone,
But rather cometh on this very night;
And though he needs must hide him from thy sight
Yet all his words of love thou well mayst hear,
And pour thy woes into no careless ear.

“Bethink thee then, with what solemnity
Thy folk, thy father, did deliver thee
To him who loves thee thus, and void of dread
Remember, sweet, thou art a bride new-wed.”

Now hearing this, did Psyche, trembling sore
And yet with lighter heart than heretofore,
Sit down and eat, till she grew scarce afraid;
And nothing but the summer noise she heard
Within the garden; then, her meal being done,
Within the window-seat she watched the sun
Changing the garden-shadows, till she grew
Fearless and happy, since she deemed she knew
The worst that could befall, while still the best
Shone a fair star far off: and mid the rest
This brought her after all her grief and fear,
She said, “How sweet it would be, could I hear,
Soft music mate the drowsy afternoon,
And drown awhile the bees’ sad murmuring tune
Within these flowering limes.” E’en as she spoke,
A sweet-voiced choir of unknown unseen folk
Singing to words that match the sense of these
Hushed the faint music of the linden trees.

CUPID AND PSYCHE

SONG

O PENSIVE, tender maid, downcast and shy,
Who turnest pale e'en at the name of love,
And with flushed face must pass the elm-tree by
Ashamed to hear the passionate grey dove
Moan to his mate, thee too the god shall move,
Thee too the maidens shall ungird one day,
And with thy girdle put thy shame away.

What then, and shall white winter ne'er be done
Because the glittering frosty morn is fair?
Because against the early-setting sun
Bright show the gilded boughs though waste and bare?
Because the robin singeth free from care?
Ah! these are memories of a better day
When on earth's face the lips of summer lay.

Come then, beloved one, for such as thee
Love loveth, and their hearts he knoweth well,
Who hoard their moments of felicity,
As misers hoard the medals that they tell,
Lest on the earth but paupers they should dwell:
"We hide our love to bless another day;
The world is hard, youth passes quick," they say.

Ah, little ones, but if ye could forget
Amidst your outpoured love that you must die,
Then ye, my servants, were death's conquerors yet,
And love to you should be eternity

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

How quick soever might the days go by :
Yes, ye are made immortal on the day
Ye cease the dusty grains of time to weigh.

Thou hearkenest, love? O, make no semblance then
That thou art loved, but as thy custom is
Turn thy grey eyes away from eyes of men,
With hands down-dropped, that tremble with thy bliss,
With hidden eyes, take thy first lover's kiss ;
Call this eternity which is to-day,
Nor dream that this our love can pass away.

They ceased, and Psyche pondering o'er their song,
Not fearing now that aught would do her wrong,
About the chambers wandered at her will,
And on the many marvels gazed her fill,
Where'er she passed still noting everything,
Then in the gardens heard the new birds sing
And watched the red fish in the fountains play,
And at the very faintest time of day
Upon the grass lay sleeping for a while
Midst heaven-sent dreams of bliss that made her smile ;
And when she woke the shades were lengthening,
So to the place where she had heard them sing
She came again, and through a little door
Entered a chamber with a marble floor,
Open a-top unto the outer air,
Beneath which lay a bath of water fair,
Paved with strange stones and figures of bright gold,
And from the steps thereof could she behold
The slim-leaved trees against the evening sky
Golden and calm, still moving languidly.

CUPID AND PSYCHE

So for a time upon the brink she sat,
Debating in her mind of this and that,
And then arose and slowly from her cast
Her raiment, and adown the steps she passed
Into the water, and therein she played,
Till of herself at last she grew afraid,
And of the broken image of her face,
And the loud splashing in that lonely place.
So from the bath she gat her quietly,
And clad herself in whatso haste might be ;
And when at last she was apparelled
Unto a chamber came, where was a bed
Of gold and ivory, and precious wood
Some island bears where never man has stood ;
And round about hung curtains of delight,
Wherein were interwoven Day and Night
Joined by the hands of Love, and round their wings
Knots of fair flowers no earthly May-time brings.
Strange for its beauty was the coverlet,
With birds and beasts and flowers wrought over it ;
And every cloth was made in daintier wise
Than any man on earth could well devise :
Yea, there such beauty was in everything,
That she, the daughter of a mighty king,
Felt strange therein, and trembled lest that she,
Deceived by dreams, had wandered heedlessly
Into a bower for some fair goddess made.
Yet if perchance some man had thither strayed,
It had been long ere he had noted aught
But her sweet face, made pensive by the thought
Of all the wonders that she moved in there.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But looking round, upon a table fair
She saw a book wherein old tales were writ,
And by the window sat, to read in it
Until the dusk had melted into night,
When waxen tapers did her servants light
With unseen hands, until it grew like day.

And so at last upon the bed she lay,
And slept a dreamless sleep for weariness,
Forgetting all the wonder and distress.

But at the dead of night she woke, and heard
A rustling noise, and grew right sore afeard,
Yea, could not move a finger for affright :
And all was darker now than darkest night.

Withal a voice close by her did she hear.
“ Alas, my love ! why tremblest thou with fear,
While I am trembling with new happiness ?
Forgive me, sweet, thy terror and distress :
Not otherwise could this our meeting be.
O loveliest ! such bliss awaiteth thee,
For all thy trouble and thy shameful tears,
Such nameless honour, and such happy years,
As fall not unto women of the earth.
Loved as thou art, thy short-lived pains are worth
The glory and the joy unspeakable
Wherein the Treasure of the World shall dwell :
A little hope, a little patience yet,
Ere everything thou wilt, thou may'st forget,
Or else remember as a well-told tale,
That for some pensive pleasure may avail.

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Canst thou not love me, then, who wrought thy woe,
That thou the height and depth of joy mightst know?"

He spoke, and as upon the bed she lay,
Trembling amidst new thoughts, he sent a ray
Of finest love unto her inmost heart,
Till, murmuring low, she strove the night to part,
And like a bride who meets her love at last,
When the long days of yearning are o'erpast,
She reached to him her perfect arms unseen,
And said, "O Love, how wretched I have been!
What hast thou done?" And by her side he lay,
Till just before the dawning of the day.

THE sun was high when Psyche woke again,
And turning to the place where he had lain
And seeing no one, doubted of the thing
That she had dreamed it, till a fair gold ring,
Unseen before, upon her hand she found,
And touching her bright head she felt it crowned
With a bright circlet; then withal she sighed,
And wondered how the oracle had lied,
And wished her father knew it, and straightway
Rose up and clad herself. Slow went the day,
Though helped with many a solace, till came night:
And therewithal the new, unseen delight,
She learned to call her Love.

So passed away
The days and nights, until upon a day

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

As in the shade, at noon she lay asleep,
She dreamed that she beheld her sisters weep,
And her old father clad in sorry guise,
Grown foolish with the weight of miseries,
Her friends black-clad and moving mournfully,
And folk in wonder landed from the sea,
At such a fall of such a matchless maid,
And in some press apart her raiment laid
Like precious relics, and an empty tomb
Set in the palace telling of her doom.

Therefore she wept in sleep, and woke with tears
Still on her face, and wet hair round her ears,
And went about unhappily that day,
Framing a gentle speech wherewith to pray
For leave to see her sisters once again,
That they might know her happy, and her pain
Turned all to joy, and honour come from shame.

And so at last night and her lover came,
And midst their fondling, suddenly she said,
"O Love, a little time we have been wed,
And yet I ask a boon of thee this night."

"Psyche," he said, "if my heart tells me right,
This thy desire may bring us bitter woe,
For who the shifting chance of fate can know?
Yet, forasmuch as mortal hearts are weak,
To-morrow shall my folk thy sisters seek,
And bear them hither; but before the day
Is fully ended must they go away.
And thou—beware—for, fresh and good and true,
Thou knowest not what worldly hearts may do,
Or what a curse gold is unto the earth,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Beware lest from thy full heart, in thy mirth,
Thou tell'st the story of thy love unseen :
Thy loving, simple heart, fits not a queen."

Then by her kisses did she know he frowned,
But close about him her fair arms she wound,
Until for happiness he 'gan to smile,
And in those arms forgot all else awhile.

So the next day, for joy that they should come,
Would Psyche further deck her strange new home,
And even as she 'gan to think the thought,
Quickly her will by unseen hands was wrought,
Who came and went like thoughts. Yea, how should I
Tell of the works of gold and ivory,
The gems and images, those hands brought there,
The prisoned things of earth, and sea, and air,
They brought to please their mistress? Many a beast,
Such as King Bacchus in his reckless feast
Makes merry with—huge elephants, snow-white
With gilded tusks, or dusky-grey with bright
And shining chains about their wrinkled necks ;
The mailed rhinoceros, that of nothing recks ;
Dusky-maned lions ; spotted leopards fair
That through the cane-brake move, unseen as air ;
The deep-mouthed tiger, dread of the brown man ;
The eagle, and the peacock, and the swan—
—These be the nobles of the birds and beasts.
But therewithal, for laughter at their feasts,
They brought them the gods' jesters, such as be
Quick-chattering apes, that yet in mockery
Of anxious men wrinkle their ugly brows ;

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Strange birds with pouches, birds with beaks like prows
Of merchant-ships, with tufted crests like threads,
With unimaginable monstrous heads.

Lo, such as these, in many a gilded cage
They brought, or chained for fear of sudden rage.

Then strewed they scented branches on the floor,
And hung rose-garlands up by the great door,
And wafted incense through the bowers and halls,
And hung up fairer hangings on the walls,
And filled the baths with water fresh and clear,
And in the chambers laid apparel fair,
And spread a table for a royal feast.

Then when from all these labours they had ceased,
Psyche they sung to sleep with lullabies ;
Who slept not long, but opening soon her eyes,
Beheld her sisters on the threshold stand :
Then did she run to take them by the hand,
And laid her cheek to theirs, and murmured words
Of little meaning, like the moan of birds,
While they bewildered stood and gazed around,
Like people who in some strange land have found
One that they thought not of ; but she at last
Stood back, and from her face the strayed locks cast,
And, smiling through her tears, said, " Ah, that ye
Should have to weep such useless tears for me !
Alas, the burden that the city bears
For nought ! O me, my father's burning tears,
That into all this honour I am come !
Nay, does he live yet ? Is the ancient home
Still standing ? do the galleys throng the quays ?
Do the brown Indians glitter down the ways

CUPID AND PSYCHE

With rubies as of old? Yes, yes, ye smile,
For ye are thinking, but a little while
Apart from these has she been dwelling here;
Truly, yet long enough, loved ones and dear,
To make me other than I was of old,
Though now when your dear faces I behold
Am I myself again. But by what road
Have ye been brought to this my new abode?"

"Sister," said one, "I rose up from my bed
It seems this morn, and being apparelléd,
And walking in my garden, in a swoon
Helpless and unattended I sank down,
Wherefrom I scarce am waked, for as a dream
Dost thou with all this royal glory seem,
But for thy kisses and thy words, O love."

"Yea, Psyche," said the other, "as I drove
The ivory shuttle through the shuttle-race,
All was changed suddenly, and in this place
I found myself, and standing on my feet,
Where me with sleepy words this one did greet.
Now, sister, tell us whence these wonders come
With all the godlike splendour of your home."

"Sisters," she said, "more marvels shall ye see
When ye have been a little while with me,
Whereof I cannot tell you more than this
That 'midst them all I dwell in ease and bliss,
Well loved and wedded to a mighty lord,
Fair beyond measure, from whose loving word
I know that happier days await me yet.
But come, my sisters, let us now forget

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

To seek for empty knowledge ; ye shall take
Some little gifts for your lost sister's sake ;
And whatso wonders ye may see or hear
Of nothing frightful have ye any fear."

Wondering they went with her, and looking round,
Each in the other's eyes a strange look found,
For these, her mother's daughters, had no part
In her divine fresh singleness of heart,
But longing to be great, remembered not
How short a time one heart on earth has got.

But keener still that guarded look now grew
As more of that strange lovely place they knew,
And as with growing hate, but still afeard,
The unseen choirs' heart-softening strains they heard,
Which did but harden these ; and when at noon
They sought the shaded waters' freshening boon,
And all unhidden once again they saw
That peerless beauty, free from any flaw,
Which now at last had won its precious meed,
Her kindness then but fed the fire of greed
Within their hearts—her gifts, the rich attire
Wherewith she clad them, where like sparks of fire
The many-coloured gems shone midst the pearls,
The soft silks' winding lines, the work of girls
By the Five Rivers ; their fair marvellous crowns,
Their sandals' fastenings worth the rent of towns,
Zones and carved rings, and nameless wonders fair,
All things her faithful slaves had brought them there,
Given amid kisses, made them not more glad ;
Since in their hearts the ravening worm they had
That love slays not, nor yet is satisfied .

CUPID AND PSYCHE

While aught but he has aught ; yet still they tried
To look as they deemed loving folk should look,
And still with words of love her bounty took.

So at the last all being apparelléd,
Her sisters to the banquet Psyche led,
Fair were they, and each seemed a glorious queen
With all that wondrous daintiness beseen,
But Psyche clad in gown of dusky blue
Little adorned, with deep grey eyes that knew
The hidden marvels of Love's holy fire,
Seemed like the soul of innocent desire,
Shut from the mocking world, wherefrom those twain
Seemed come to lure her thence with labour vain.

Now having reached the place where they should eat,
Ere 'neath the canopy the three took seat,
The eldest sister unto Psyche said,
" And he, dear love, the man that thou hast wed,
Will he not wish to-day thy kin to see?
Then could we tell of thy felicity
The better, to our folk and father dear."

Then Psyche reddened, " Nay, he is not here,"
She stammered, " neither will be here to-day,
For mighty matters keep him far away."
" Alas !" the younger sister said, " Say then,
What is the likeness of this first of men ;
What sayest thou about his loving eyne,
Are his locks black, or golden-red as thine ? "
" Black-haired like me," said Psyche stammering,
And looking round, " what say I ? like the king

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Who rules the world, he seems to me at least—
Come, sisters, sit, and let us make good feast!
My darling and my love ye shall behold
I doubt not soon, his crispy hair of gold,
His eyes unseen; and ye shall hear his voice,
That in my joy ye also may rejoice.”

Then did they hold their peace, although indeed
Her stammering haste they did not fail to heed.
But at their wondrous royal feast they sat
Thinking their thoughts, and spoke of this or that
Between the bursts of music, until when
The sun was leaving the abodes of men;
And then must Psyche to her sisters say
That she was bid, her husband being away,
To suffer none at night to harbour there,
No, not the mother that her body bare
Or father that begat her, therefore they
Must leave her now, till some still happier day.
And therewithal more precious gifts she brought
Whereof not e'en in dreams they could have thought,
Things whereof noble stories might be told;
And said; “These matters that you here behold
Shall be the worst of gifts that you shall have;
Farewell, farewell! and may the high gods save
Your lives and fame; and tell our father dear
Of all the honour that I live in here,
And how that greater happiness shall come
When I shall reach a long-enduring home.”
Then these, though burning through the night to stay,
Spake loving words, and went upon their way,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

When weeping she had kissed them ; but they wept
Such tears as traitors do, for as they stepped
Over the threshold, in each other's eyes
They looked, for each was eager to surprise
The envy that their hearts were filled withal,
That to their lips came welling up like gall.

“So,” said the first, “this palace without folk,
These wonders done with none to strike a stroke,
This singing in the air, and no one seen,
These gifts too wonderful for any queen,
The trance wherein we both were wrapt away,
And set down by her golden house to-day—
—These are the deeds of gods, and not of men ;
And fortunate the day was to her, when
Weeping she left the house where we were born,
And all men deemed her shamed and most forlorn.”

Then said the other, reddening in her rage,
“She is the luckiest one of all this age ;
And yet she might have told us of her case,
What god it is that dwelleth in the place,
Nor sent us forth like beggars from her gate.
And beggarly, O sister, is our fate,
Whose husbands wring from miserable hinds
What the first battle scatters to the winds ;
While she to us whom from her door she drives
And makes of no account or honour, gives
Such wonderful and priceless gifts as these,
Fit to bedeck the limbs of goddesses !
And yet who knows but she may get a fall ?
The strongest tower has not the highest wall,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Think well of this, when you sit safe at home."

By this unto the river were they come,
Where waited Zephyrus unseen, who cast
A languor over them that quickly passed
Into deep sleep, and on the grass they sank ;
Then straightway did he lift them from the bank,
And quickly each in her fair house set down,
Then flew aloft above the sleeping town.

Long in their homes they brooded over this,
And how that Psyche nigh a goddess is ;
While all folk deemed that she quite lost had been,
For nought they said of all that they had seen.

But now that night when she, with many a kiss,
Had told their coming, and of that and this
That happed, he said, "These things, O Love, are well ;
Glad am I that no evil thing befell.
And yet, between thy father's house and me
Must thou choose now ; then either royally
Shalt thou go home, and wed some king at last,
And have no harm for all that here has passed ;
Or else, my love, bear as thy brave heart may,
This loneliness in hope of that fair day,
Which, by my head, shall come to thee ; and then
Shalt thou be glorious to the sons of men,
And by my side shalt sit in such estate
That in all time all men shall sing thy fate."

But with that word such love through her he breathed,
That round about him her fair arms she wreathed ;
And so with loving passed the night away,
And with fresh hope came on the fresh May-day.

CUPID AND PSYCHE

And so passed many a day and many a night,
And weariness was balanced with delight,
And into such a mind was Psyche brought,
That little of her father's house she thought,
But ever of the happy day to come
When she should go unto her promised home

Till she that threw the golden apple down
Upon the board, and lighted up Troy town,
On dusky wings came flying o'er the place,
And seeing Psyche with her happy face
Asleep beneath some fair tree blossoming,
Into her sleep straight cast an evil thing;
Whereby she dreamed she saw her father laid
Panting for breath beneath the golden shade
Of his great bed's embroidered canopy,
And with his last breath moaning heavily
Her name and fancied woes; thereat she woke,
And this ill dream through all her quiet broke,
And when next morn her Love from her would go,
And going, as it was his wont to do,
Would kiss her sleeping, he must find the tears
Filling the hollows of her rosy ears
And wetting half the golden hair that lay
'Twixt him and her: then did he speak and say,
"O Love, why dost thou lie awake and weep,
Who for content shouldst have good heart to sleep
This cold hour ere the dawning?" Nought she said,
But wept aloud. Then cried he, "By my head!
Whate'er thou wishest I will do for thee;
Yea, if it make an end of thee and me."

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

“O Love,” she said, “I scarce dare ask again,
Yet is there in mine heart an aching pain
To know what of my father is become :
So would I send my sisters to my home,
Because I doubt indeed they never told
Of all my honour in this house of gold ;
And now of them a great oath would I take.”

He said, “Alas ! and hast thou been awake
For them indeed ? who in my arms asleep
Mightst well have been ; for their sakes didst thou weep,
Who mightst have smiled to feel my kiss on thee ?
Yet as thou wishest once more shall it be,
Because my oath constrains me, and thy tears.
And yet again beware, and make these fears
Of none avail ; nor waver any more,
I pray thee : for already to the shore
Of all delights and joys thou drawest nigh.”

He spoke, and from the chamber straight did fly
To highest heaven, and going softly then,
Wearied the father of all gods and men
With prayers for Psyche’s immortality.

Meantime went Zephyrus across the sea,
To bring her sisters to her arms again,
Though of that message little was he fain,
Knowing their malice and their cankered hearts.

For now these two had thought upon their parts
And made up a false tale for Psyche’s ear ;
For when awaked, to her they drew anear,
Sobbing, their faces in their hands they hid,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Nor when she asked them why this thing they did
Would answer aught, till trembling Psyche said,
"Nay, nay, what is it? is our father dead?
Or do ye weep these tears for shame that ye
Have told him not of my felicity,
To make me weep amidst my new-found bliss?
Be comforted, for short the highway is
To my forgiveness: this day shall ye go
And take him gifts, and tell him all ye know
Of this my unexpected happy lot."

Amidst fresh sobs one said, "We told him not
But by good counsel did we hide the thing,
Deeming it well that he should feel the sting
For once, than for awhile be glad again,
And after come to suffer double pain."

"Alas! what mean you, sister?" Psyche said,
For terror waxing pale as are the dead.
"O sister, speak!" "Child, by this loving kiss,"
Spake one of them, "and that remembered bliss
We dwelt in when our mother was alive,
Or ever we began with ills to strive,
By all the hope thou hast to see again
Our aged father and to soothe his pain,
I charge thee tell me,—Hast thou seen the thing
Thou callest Husband?"

Breathless, quivering,
Psyche cried out, "Alas! what sayest thou?
What riddles wilt thou speak unto me now?"

"Alas!" she said; "then is it as I thought.
Sister, in dreadful places have we sought
To learn about thy case, and thus we found

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

A wise man, dwelling underneath the ground
In a dark awful cave: he told to us
A horrid tale thereof, and piteous,
That thou wert wedded to an evil thing,
A serpent-bodied fiend of poisonous sting,
Bestial of form, yet therewith lacking not
E'en such a soul as wicked men have got.
Thus ages long ago the gods made him,
And set him in a lake hereby to swim;
But every hundred years he hath this grace,
That he may change within this golden place
Into a fair young man by night alone.
Alas, my sister, thou hast cause to groan!
What sayest thou?—*His words are fair and soft;
He raineth loving kisses on me oft,
Weeping for love; he tells me of a day
When from this place we both shall go away,
And he shall kiss me then no more unseen,
The while I sit by him a glorious queen—*
—Alas, poor child! it pleaseth thee, his kiss?
Then must I show thee why he doeth this:
Because he willeth for a time to save
Thy body, wretched one! that he may have
Both child and mother for his watery hell—
Ah, what a tale this is for me to tell!

“Thou prayest us to save thee, and we can;
Since for nought else we sought that wise old man,
Who for great gifts and seeing that of kings
We both were come, has told us all these things,
And given us a fair lamp of hallowed oil
That he has wrought with danger and much toil;

CUPID AND PSYCHE

And thereto has he added a sharp knife,
In forging which he well-nigh lost his life,
About him so the devils of the pit
Came swarming—O, my sister, hast thou it?"

Straight from her gown the other one drew out
The lamp and knife, which Psyche, dumb with doubt
And misery at once, took in her hand.

Then said her sister, "From this doubtful land
Thou gav'st us royal gifts a while ago,
But these we give thee, though they lack for show,
Shall be to thee a better gift,—thy life.
Put now in some sure place this lamp and knife,
And when he sleeps rise silently from bed
And hold the hallowed lamp above his head,
And swiftly draw the charmed knife across
His cursed neck, thou well may'st bear the loss,
Nor shall he keep his man's shape more, when he
First feels the iron wrought so mysticly :
But thou, flee unto us, we have a tale,
Of what has been thy lot within this vale,
When we have 'scaped therefrom, which we shall do
By virtue of strange spells the old man knew.
Farewell, sweet sister ! here we may not stay,
Lest in returning he should pass this way ;
But in the vale we will not fail to wait
Till thou art loosened from thine evil fate."

Thus went they, and for long they said not aught,
Fearful lest any should surprise their thought,
But in such wise had envy conquered fear,
That they were fain that eve to bide anear
Their sister's ruined home ; but when they came

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Unto the river, on them fell the same
Resistless languor they had felt before.
And from the blossoms of that flowery shore
Their sleeping bodies soon did Zephyr bear,
For other folk to hatch new ill and care.

But on the ground sat Psyche all alone,
The lamp and knife beside her, and no moan
She made, but silent let the long hours go,
Till dark night closed around her and her woe.

Then trembling she arose, for now drew near
The time of utter loneliness and fear,
And she must think of death, who until now
Had thought of ruined life, and love brought low ;
And with that thought, tormenting doubt there came,
And images of some unheard-of shame,
Until forlorn, entrapped of gods she felt,
As though in some strange hell her spirit dwelt.

Yet driven by her sisters' words at last,
And by remembrance of the time now past,
When she stood trembling, as the oracle
With all its fearful doom upon her fell,
She to her hapless wedding-chamber turned,
And while the waxen tapers freshly burned
She laid those dread gifts ready to her hand,
Then quenched the lights, and by the bed did stand,
Turning these matters in her troubled mind ;
And sometimes hoped some glorious man to find
Beneath the lamp, fit bridegroom for a bride
Like her ; ah, then ! with what joy to his side
Would she creep back in the dark silent night ;

CUPID AND PSYCHE

But whiles she quaked at thought of what a sight
The lamp might show her ; the hot rush of blood
The knife might shed upon her as she stood,
The dread of some pursuit, the hurrying out,
Through rooms where every sound would seem a shout
Into the windy night among the trees,
Where many a changing monstrous sight one sees,
When nought at all has happed to chill the blood.

But as among these evil thoughts she stood,
She heard him coming, and straight crept to bed,
And felt him touch her with a new-born dread,
And durst not answer to his words of love.
But when he slept, she rose that tale to prove,
And sliding down as softly as might be,
And moving through the chamber quietly,
She gat the lamp within her trembling hand,
And long, debating of these things, did stand
In that thick darkness, till she seemed to be
A dweller in some black eternity,
And what she once had called the world did seem
A hollow void, a colourless mad dream ;
For she felt so alone—three times in vain
She moved her heavy hand, three times again
It fell adown ; at last throughout the place
Its flame glared, lighting up her woeful face,
Whose eyes the silken carpet did but meet,
Grown strange and awful, and her own wan feet
As toward the bed she stole ; but come thereto
Back with closed eyes and quivering lips, she threw
Her lovely head, and strove to think of it,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

While images of fearful things did flit
Before her eyes ; thus, raising up the hand
That bore the lamp, one moment did she stand
As man's time tells it, and then suddenly
Opened her eyes, but scarce kept back a cry
At what she saw ; for there before her lay
The very Love brighter than dawn of day ;
And as he lay there smiling, her own name
His gentle lips in sleep began to frame,
And as to touch her face his hand did move ;
O then, indeed, her faint heart swelled for love,
And she began to sob, and tears fell fast
Upon the bed.—But as she turned at last
To quench the lamp, there happed a little thing
That quenched her new delight, for flickering
The treacherous flame cast on his shoulder fair
A burning drop ; he woke, and seeing her there
The meaning of that sad sight knew full well,
Nor was there need the piteous tale to tell.

Then on her knees she fell with a great cry,
For in his face she saw the thunder nigh,
And she began to know what she had done,
And saw herself henceforth, unloved, alone,
Pass onward to the grave ; and once again
She heard the voice she now must love in vain.

“Ah, has it come to pass ? and hast thou lost
A life of love, and must thou still be tossed
One moment in the sun 'twixt night and night ?
And must I lose what would have been delight,
Untasted yet amidst immortal bliss,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

¶ To wed a soul made worthy of my kiss,
Set in a frame so wonderfully made?

“O wavering heart, farewell! be not afraid
That I with fire will burn thy body fair,
Or cast thy sweet limbs piecemeal through the air;
The fates shall work thy punishment alone,
And thine own memory of our kindness done.

“Alas! what wilt thou do? how shalt thou
bear

The cruel world, the sickening still despair,
The mocking, curious faces bent on thee,
When thou hast known what love there is in me?
O happy only, if thou couldst forget,
And live unholpen, lonely, loveless yet,
But untormented through the little span
That on the earth ye call the life of man.
Alas! that thou, too fair a thing to die,
Shouldst so be born to double misery!

“Farewell! though I, a god, can never know
How thou canst lose thy pain, yet time will go
Over thine head, and thou mayst mingle yet
The bitter and the sweet, nor quite forget,
Nor quite remember, till these things shall seem
The wavering memory of a lovely dream.”

Therewith he caught his shafts up and his bow,
And striding through the chambers did he go,
Light all around him; and she, wailing sore,
Still followed after; but he turned no more,
And when into the moonlit night he came
From out her sight he vanished like a flame,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And on the threshold till the dawn of day
Through all the changes of the night she lay.

AT daybreak when she lifted up her eyes,
She looked around with heavy dull surprise,
And rose to enter the fair golden place ;
But then remembering all her piteous case
She turned away, lamenting very sore,
And wandered down unto the river shore ;
There, at the head of a green pool and deep,
She stood so long that she forgot to weep,
And the wild things about the water-side
From such a silent thing cared not to hide ;
The dace pushed 'gainst the stream, the dragon-fly,
With its green-painted wing, went flickering by ;
The water-hen, the lusted kingfisher,
Went on their ways and took no heed of her ;
The little reed birds never ceased to sing,
And still the eddy, like a living thing,
Broke into sudden gurgles at her feet.
But 'midst these fair things, on that morning sweet,
How could she, weary creature, find a place ?
She moved at last, and lifting up her face,
Gathered her raiment up and cried, " Farewell,
O fairest lord ! and since I cannot dwell
With thee in heaven, let me now hide my head
In whatsoever dark place dwell the dead ! "

And with that word she leapt into the stream,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

But the kind river even yet did deem
That she should live, and, with all gentle care,
Cast her ashore within a meadow fair
Upon the other side, where Shepherd Pan
Sat looking down upon the water wan,
Goat-legged and merry, who called out, "Fair maid,
Why goest thou hurrying to the feeble shade
Whence none return? Well do I know thy pain,
For I am old, and have not lived in vain;
Thou wilt forget all that within a while,
And on some other happy youth wilt smile;
And sure he must be dull indeed if he
Forget not all things in his ecstasy
At sight of such a wonder made for him,
That in that clinging gown makes mine eyes swim,
Old as I am : but to the god of Love
Pray now, sweet child, for all things can he move."

Weeping she passed him, but full reverently,
And well she saw that she was not to die
Till she had filled the measure of her woe.

So through the meads she passed, half blind and slow,
And on her sisters somewhat now she thought;
And, pondering on the evil they had wrought,
The veil fell from her, and she saw their guile.

"Alas!" she said, "can death make folk so vile?
What wonder that the gods are glorious then,
Who cannot feel the hates and fears of men?
Sisters, alas, for what ye used to be!
Once did I think, whatso might hap to me,
Still at the worst, within your arms to find

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

A haven of pure love ; then were ye kind,
Then was your joy e'en as my very own—
And now, and now, if I can be alone
That is my best : but that can never be,
For your unkindness still shall stay with me
When ye are dead—But thou, my love ! my dear !
Wert thou not kind ?—I should have lost my fear
Within a little—Yea, and e'en just now
With angry godhead on thy lovely brow,
Still thou wert kind—And art thou gone away
For ever ? I know not, but day by day
Still will I seek thee till I come to die,
And nurse remembrance of felicity
Within my heart, although it wound me sore ;
For what am I but thine for evermore ! ”

Thenceforth her back upon the world she turned
As she had known it ; in her heart there burned
Such deathless love, that still untired she went :
The huntsman dropping down the woody bent,
In the still evening, saw her passing by,
And for her beauty fain would draw anigh,
But yet durst not ; the shepherd on the down
Wondering, would shade his eyes with fingers brown,
As on the hill's brow, looking o'er the lands,
She stood with straining eyes and clinging hands,
While the wind blew the raiment from her feet ;
The wandering soldier her grey eyes would meet,
That took no heed of him, and drop his own ;
Like a thin dream she passed the clattering town ;
On the thronged quays she watched the ships come in

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Patient, amid the strange outlandish din ;
Unscared she saw the sacked towns' miseries,
And marching armies passed before her eyes.
And still of her the god had such a care
That none might wrong her, though alone and fair.
Through rough and smooth she wandered many a day,
Till all her hope had well-nigh passed away.

Meanwhile the sisters, each in her own home,
Waited the day when outcast she should come
And ask their pity ; when perchance, indeed,
They looked to give her shelter in her need,
And with soft words such faint reproaches take
As she durst make them for her ruin's sake ;
But day passed day, and still no Psyche came,
And while they wondered whether, to their shame,
Their plot had failed, or gained its end too well,
And Psyche slain, no tale thereof could tell.—
Amidst these things, the eldest sister lay
Asleep one evening of a summer day,
Dreaming she saw the god of Love anigh,
Who seemed to say unto her lovingly,
“Hail unto thee, fair sister of my love ;
Nor fear me for that thou her faith didst prove,
And found it wanting, for thou, too, art fair,
Nor is her place filled ; rise, and have no care
For father or for friends, but go straightway
Unto the rock where she was borne that day ;
There, if thou hast a will to be my bride,
Put thou all fear of horrid death aside,
And leap from off the cliff, and there will come

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

My slaves, to bear thee up and take thee home.
Haste then, before the summer night grows late,
For in my house thy beauty I await ! ”

So spake the dream ; and through the night did sail,
And to the other sister bore the tale,
While this one rose, nor doubted of the thing,
Such deadly pride unto her heart did cling ;
But by the tapers' light triumphantly,
Smiling, her mirrored body did she eye,
Then hastily rich raiment on her cast
And through the sleeping serving-people passed,
And looked with changed eyes on the moonlit street,
Nor scarce could feel the ground beneath her feet.
But long the time seemed to her, till she came
There where her sister once was borne to shame ;
And when she reached the bare cliff's rugged brow
She cried aloud, “ O Love, receive me now,
Who am not all unworthy to be thine ! ”
And with that word, her jewelled arms did shine
Outstretched beneath the moon, and with one breath
She sprung to meet the outstretched arms of Death,
The only god that waited for her there,
And in a gathered moment of despair
A hideous thing her traitrous life did seem.

But with the passing of that hollow dream
The other sister rose, and as she might,
Arrayed herself alone in that still night,
And so stole forth, and making no delay
Came to the rock anigh the dawn of day ;
No warning there her sister's spirit gave,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

No doubt came nigh the fore-doomed soul to save,
But with a fever burning in her blood,
With glittering eyes and crimson cheeks she stood
One moment on the brow, the while she cried,
"Receive me, Love, chosen to be thy bride
From all the million women of the world!"
Then o'er the cliff her wicked limbs were hurled,
Nor has the language of the earth a name
For that surprise of terror and of shame.

NOW, midst her wanderings, on a hot noontide,
Psyche passed down a road, where, on each side,
The yellow cornfields lay, although as yet
Unto the stalks no sickle had been set;
The lark sung over them, the butterfly
Flickered from ear to ear distractedly,
The kestrel hung above, the weasel peered
From out the wheat-stalks on her unafraid,
Along the road the trembling poppies shed
On the burnt grass their crumpled leaves and red;
Most lonely was it, nothing Psyche knew
Unto what land of all the world she drew;
Awearied was she, faint and sick at heart,
Bowed to the earth by thoughts of that sad part
She needs must play: some blue flower from the corn
That in her fingers erewhile she had borne,
Now dropped from them, still clung unto her gown;
Over the hard way hung her head adown

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Despairingly, but still her weary feet
Moved on half conscious, her lost love to meet.

So going, at the last she raised her eyes,
And saw a grassy mound before her rise
Over the yellow plain, and thereon was
A marble fane with doors of burnished brass,
That 'twixt the pillars set about it burned ;
So thitherward from off the road she turned,
And soon she heard a rippling water sound,
And reached a stream that girt the hill around,
Whose green waves wooed her body lovingly ;
So looking round, and seeing no soul anigh,
Unclad, she crossed the shallows, and there laid
Her dusty raiment in the alder-shade,
And slipped adown into the shaded pool,
And with the pleasure of the water cool
Soothed her tired limbs awhile, then with a sigh
Came forth, and clad her body hastily,
And up the hill made for the little fane.

But when its threshold now her feet did gain,
She, looking through the pillars of the shrine,
Beheld therein a golden image shine
Of golden Ceres ; then she passed the door,
And with bowed head she stood awhile before
The smiling image, striving for some word
That did not name her lover and her lord,
Until midst rising tears at last she prayed :

“ O kind one, if while yet I was a maid
I ever did thee pleasure, on this day
Be kind to me, poor wanderer on the way,
Who strive my love upon the earth to meet !

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Then let me rest my weary, doubtful feet
Within thy quiet house a little while,
And on my rest if thou wouldst please to smile,
And send me news of my own love and lord,
It would not cost thee, lady, many a word."

But straight from out the shrine a sweet voice came,
"O Psyche, though of me thou hast no blame,
And though indeed thou sparedst not to give
What my soul loved, while happy thou didst live,
Yet little can I give now unto thee,
Since thou art rebel, slave, and enemy
Unto the love-inspiring Queen ; this grace
Thou hast alone of me, to leave this place
Free as thou camest, though the lovely one
Seeks for the sorceress who entrapped her son
In every land, and has small joy in aught,
Until before her presence thou art brought."

Then Psyche, trembling at the words she spake,
Durst answer nought, nor for that counsel's sake
Could other offerings leave except her tears,
As now, tormented by the new-born fears
The words divine had raised in her, she passed
The brazen threshold once again, and cast
A dreary hopeless look across the plain,
Whose golden beauty now seemed nought and vain
Unto her aching heart ; then down the hill
She went, and crossed the shallows of the rill,
And wearily she went upon her way,
Nor any homestead passed upon that day,
Nor any hamlet, and at night lay down
Within a wood, far off from any town.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

There, waking at the dawn, did she behold,
Through the green leaves, a glimmer as of gold,
And, passing on, amidst an oak-grove found
A pillared temple gold-adorned and round,
Whose walls were hung with rich and precious things,
Worthy to be the ransom of great kings;
And in the midst of gold and ivory
An image of Queen Juno did she see;
Then her heart swelled within her, and she thought,
"Surely the gods hereto my steps have brought,
And they will yet be merciful and give
Some little joy to me, that I may live
Till my Love finds me." Then upon her knees
She fell, and prayed, "O Crown of goddesses,
I pray thee, give me shelter in this place,
Nor turn away from me thy much-loved face,
If ever I gave golden gifts to thee
In happier times when my right hand was free."

Then from the inmost shrine there came a voice
That said, "It is so, well mayst thou rejoice
That of thy gifts I yet have memory,
Wherefore mayst thou depart forewarned and free;
Since she that won the golden apple lives,
And to her servants mighty gifts now gives
To find thee out, in whatso land thou art,
For thine undoing: loiter not, depart!
For what immortal yet shall shelter thee
From her that rose from out the unquiet sea?"

Then Psyche moaned out in her grief and fear,
"Alas! and is there shelter anywhere
Upon the green flame-hiding earth?" said she,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

“Or yet beneath it is there peace for me?
O Love, since in thine arms I cannot rest,
Or lay my weary head upon thy breast,
Have pity yet upon thy love forlorn,
Make me as though I never had been born!”

Then wearily she went upon her way,
And so, about the middle of the day,
She came before a green and flowery place,
Walled round about in manner of a chase,
Whereof the gates as now were open wide;
Fair grassy glades and long she saw inside
Betwixt great trees, down which the unscared deer
Were playing; yet a pang of deadly fear,
She knew not why, shot coldly through her heart,
And thrice she turned as though she would depart,
And thrice returned, and in the gateway stood
With wavering feet: small flowers as red as blood
Were growing up amid the soft green grass,
And here and there a fallen rose there was,
And on the trodden grass a silken lace,
As though crowned revellers had passed by the place:
The restless sparrows chirped upon the wall
And faint far music on her ears did fall,
And from the trees within, the pink-foot doves
Still told their weary tale unto their loves,
And all seemed peaceful more than words could say.

Then she, whose heart still whispered, “Keep away,”
Was drawn by strong desire unto the place,
So toward the greenest glade she set her face,
Murmuring, “Alas! and what a wretch am I,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

That I should fear the summer's greenery !
Yea, and is death now any more an ill,
When lonely through the world I wander still."

But when she was amidst those ancient groves,
Whose close green leaves and choirs of moaning doves
Shut out the world, then so alone she seemed,
So strange, her former life was but as dreamed ;
Beside the hopes and fears that drew her on,
Till so far through that green place she had won,
That she a rose-hedged garden could behold
Before a house made beautiful with gold ;
Which, to her mind beset with that past dream,
And dim foreshadowings of ill fate, did seem
That very house, her joy and misery,
Where that fair sight her longing eyes did see
They should not see again ; but now the sound
Of pensive music echoing all around,
Made all things like a picture, and from thence
Bewildering odours floating, dulled her sense,
And killed her fear, and, urged by strong desire
To see how all should end, she drew yet nigher,
And o'er the hedge beheld the heads of girls
Embraced by garlands fresh and orient pearls,
And heard sweet voices murmuring ; then a thrill
Of utmost joy all memory seemed to kill
Of good or evil, and her eager hand
Was on the wicket, then her feet did stand
Upon new flowers, the while her dizzied eyes
Gazed wildly round on half-seen mysteries,
And wandered from unnoting face to face.

For round a fountain midst the flowery place

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Did she behold full many a minstrel girl ;
While nigh them, on the grass in giddy whirl,
Bright raiment and white limbs and sandalled feet
Flew round in time unto the music sweet,
Whose strains no more were pensive now nor sad,
But rather a fresh sound of triumph had ;
And round the dance were gathered damsels fair,
Clad in rich robes adorned with jewels rare ;
Or little hidden by some woven mist,
That, hanging round them, here a bosom kissed
And there a knee, or driven by the wind
About some lily's bowing stem was twined.

But when a little Psyche's eyes grew clear,
A sight they saw that brought back all her fear
A hundred-fold, though neither heaven nor earth
To such a fair sight elsewhere could give birth ;
Because apart, upon a golden throne
Of marvellous work, a woman sat alone,
Watching the dancers with a smiling face,
Whose beauty sole had lighted up the place.
A crown there was upon her glorious head,
A garland round about her girdlestead,
Where matchless wonders of the hidden sea
Were brought together and set wonderfully ;
Naked she was of all else, but her hair
About her body rippled here and there,
And lay in heaps upon the golden seat,
And even touched the gold cloth where her feet
Lay amid roses—ah, how kind she seemed !
What depths of love from out her grey eyes beamed !

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Well might the birds leave singing on the trees
To watch in peace that crown of goddesses,
Yet well might Psyche sicken at the sight,
And feel her feet wax heavy, her head light ;
For now at last her evil day was come,
Since she had wandered to the very home
Of her most bitter cruel enemy.

Half-dead, yet must she turn about to flee,
But as her eyes back o'er her shoulder gazed,
And with weak hands her clinging gown she raised,
And from her lips unwitting came a moan,
She felt strong arms about her body thrown,
And, blind with fear, was haled along till she
Saw floating by her faint eyes dizzily
That vision of the pearls and roses fresh,
The golden carpet and the rosy flesh.

Then, as in vain she strove to make some sound,
A sweet voice seemed to pierce the air around
With bitter words ; her doom rang in her ears,
She felt the misery that lacketh tears,
“Come hither, damsels, and the pearl behold
That hath no price? See now the thrice-tried gold,
That all men worshipped, that a god would have
To be his bride ! how like a wretched slave
She cowers down, and lacketh even voice
To plead her cause ! Come, damsels, and rejoice
That now once more the waiting world will move,
Since she is found, the well-loved soul of love !

“And thou, poor wretch, what god hath led thee
here?
Art thou so lost in this abyss of fear,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Thou canst not weep thy misery and shame?
Canst thou not even speak thy shameful name?"

But even then the flame of fervent love
In Psyche's tortured heart began to move,
And gave her utterance, and she said, "Alas!
Surely the end of life has come to pass
For me, who have been bride of very Love,
Yet love still bides in me, O Seed of Jove,
For such I know thee; slay me, nought is lost!
For had I had the will to count the cost
And buy my love with all this misery,
Thus and no otherwise the thing should be.
Would I were dead, my wretched beauty gone,
No trouble now to thee or any one!"

And with that last word did she hang her head,
As one who hears not, whatsoe'er is said;
But Venus rising with a dreadful cry
Said, "O thou fool, I will not let thee die!
But thou shalt reap the harvest thou hast sown
And many a day thy wretched lot bemoan.
Thou art my slave, and not a day shall be
But I will find some fitting task for thee,
Nor will I slay thee till thou hop'st again.
What, thinkest thou that utterly in vain
Jove is my sire, and in despite my will
That thou canst mock me with thy beauty still?
Come forth, O strong-armed, punish this new slave,
That she henceforth a humble heart may have."

All round about the damsels in a ring
Were drawn to see the ending of the thing,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And now as Psyche's eyes stared wildly round
No help in any face of them she found
As from the fair and dreadful face she turned
In whose grey eyes such steadfast anger burned ;
Yet midst her agony she scarcely knew
What thing it was the goddess bade them do,
And all the pageant, like a dreadful dream
Hopeless and long-enduring grew to seem ;
Yea, when the strong-armed through the crowd did break,
Girls like to those, whose close-locked squadron shake
The echoing surface of the Asian plain,
And when she saw their threatening hands, in vain
She strove to speak, so like a dream it was ;
So like a dream that this should come to pass,
And 'neath her feet the green earth opened not.

But when her breaking heart again waxed hot
With dreadful thoughts and prayers unspeakable
As all their bitter torment on her fell,
When she her own voice heard, nor knew its sound,
And like red flame she saw the trees and ground,
Then first she seemed to know what misery
To helpless folk upon the earth can be.

But while beneath the many moving feet
The small crushed flowers sent up their odour sweet,
Above sat Venus, calm, and very fair,
Her white limbs bared of all her golden hair,
Into her heart all wrath cast back again,
As on the terror and the helpless pain
She gazed with gentle eyes, and unmoved smile ;
Such as in Cyprus, the fair blossomed isle,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

When on the altar in the summer night
They pile the roses up for her delight,
Men see within their hearts, and long that they
Unto her very body there might pray.

At last to them some dainty sign she made
To hold their cruel hands, and therewith bade
To bear her slave new gained from out her sight
And keep her safely till the morrow's light :
So her across the sunny sward they led
With fainting limbs, and heavy downcast head,
And into some nigh lightless prison cast
To brood alone o'er happy days long past
And all the dreadful times that yet should be.

But she being gone, one moment pensively
The goddess did the distant hills behold,
Then bade her girls bind up her hair of gold,
And veil her breast, the very forge of love,
With raiment that no earthly shuttle wove,
And 'gainst the hard earth arm her lovely feet :
Then she went forth, some shepherd king to meet
Deep in the hollow of a shaded vale,
To make his woes a long-enduring tale.

BUT over Psyche, hapless and forlorn,
Unseen the sun rose on the morrow morn,
Nor knew she aught about the death of night
Until her gaoler's torches filled with light
The dreary place, blinding her unused eyes,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And she their voices heard that bade her rise ;
She did their bidding, yet grown faint and pale
She shrank away and strove her arms to veil
In her gown's bosom, and to hide from them
Her little feet within her garment's hem ;
But mocking her, they brought her thence away,
And led her forth into the light of day,
And brought her to a marble cloister fair
Where sat the queen on her adorned chair,
But she, as down the sun-streaked place they came,
Cried out, "Haste ! ye, who lead my grief and shame."
And when she stood before her trembling, said,
"Although within a palace thou wast bred
Yet dost thou carry but a slavish heart,
And fitting is it thou shouldst learn thy part,
And know the state whereunto thou art brought ;
Now, heed what yesterday thy folly taught,
And set thyself to-day my will to do ;
Ho ye, bring that which I commanded you."

Then forth came two, and each upon her back
Bore up with pain a huge half-bursten sack,
Which, setting down, they opened on the floor,
And from their hempen mouths a stream did pour
Of mingled seeds, and grain, peas, pulse, and wheat,
Poppies and millet, and coriander sweet,
And many another brought from far-off lands,
Which mingling more with swift and ready hands
They piled into a heap confused and great.

And then said Venus, rising from her seat,
"Slave, here I leave thee, but before the night

CUPID AND PSYCHE

These mingled seeds thy hands shall set aright,
All laid in heaps, each after its own kind,
And if in any heap I chance to find
An alien seed ; thou knowest since yesterday
How disobedient slaves the forfeit pay."

Therewith she turned and left the palace fair
And from its outskirts rose into the air,
And flew until beneath her lay the sea,
Then, looking on its green waves lovingly,
Somewhat she dropped, and low adown she flew
Until she reached the temple that she knew
Within a sunny bay of her fair isle.

But Psyche sadly labouring all the while
With hopeless heart felt the swift hours go by,
And knowing well what bitter mockery
Lay in that task, yet did she what she might
That something should be finished ere the night,
And she a little mercy yet might ask ;
But the first hours of that long feverish task
Passed amid mocks ; for oft the damsels came
About her, and made merry with her shame,
And laughed to see her trembling eagerness,
And how, with some small lappet of her dress,
She winnowed out the wheat, and how she bent
Over the millet, hopelessly intent ;
And how she guarded well some tiny heap
But just begun, from their long raiments' sweep ;
And how herself, with girt gown, carefully
She went betwixt the heaps that 'gan to lie
Along the floor ; though they were small enow,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

When shadows lengthened and the sun was low ;
But at the last these left her labouring,
Not daring now to weep, lest some small thing
Should 'scape her blinded eyes, and soon far off
She heard the echoes of their careless scoff.

Longer the shades grew, quicker sank the sun,
Until at last the day was well-nigh done,
And every minute did she think to hear
The fair Queen's dreaded footsteps drawing near ;
But Love, that moves the earth, and skies, and sea,
Beheld his old love in her misery,
And wrapped her heart in sudden gentle sleep ;
And meanwhile caused unnumbered ants to creep
About her, and they wrought so busily
That all, ere sundown, was as it should be,
And homeward went again the kingless folk.

Bewildered with her joy again she woke,
But scarce had time the unseen hands to bless,
That thus had helped her utter feebleness,
Ere Venus came, fresh from the watery way,
Panting with all the pleasure of the day ;
But when she saw the ordered heaps, her smile
Faded away, she cried out, " Base and vile
Thou art indeed, this labour fitteth thee ;
But now I know thy feigned simplicity,
Thine inward cunning, therefore hope no more,
Since thou art furnished well with hidden lore,
To 'scape thy due reward, if any day
Without some task accomplished, pass away ! "

So with a frown she passed on, muttering,
" Nought have I done, to-morrow a new thing."

CUPID AND PSYCHE

So the next morning Psyche did they lead
Unto a terrace o'er a flowery mead,
Where Venus sat, hid from the young sun's rays,
Upon the fairest of all summer days ;
She pointed o'er the meads as they drew nigh,
And said, "See how that stream goes glittering by,
And on its banks my golden sheep now pass,
Cropping sweet mouthfuls of the flowery grass ;
If thou, O cunning slave, to-day art fain
To save thyself from well-remembered pain,
Put forth a little of thy hidden skill,
And with their golden fleece thy bosom fill ;
Yet make no haste, but ere the sun is down
Cast it before my feet from out thy gown ;
Surely thy labour is but light to-day."

Then sadly went poor Psyche on her way,
Wondering wherein the snare lay, for she knew
No easy thing it was she had to do ;
Nor had she failed indeed to note the smile
Wherewith the goddess praised her for the guile
That she, unhappy, lacked so utterly.

Amidst these thoughts she crossed the flowery lea,
And came unto the glittering river's side ;
And, seeing it was neither deep nor wide,
She drew her sandals off, and to the knee
Girt up her gown, and by a willow-tree
Went down into the water, and but sank
Up to mid-leg therein ; but from the bank
She scarce had gone three steps, before a voice
Called out to her, "Stay, Psyche, and rejoice
That I am here to help thee, a poor reed,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

The soother of the loving hearts that bleed,
The pourer forth of notes, that oft have made
The weak man strong, and the rash man afraid.

“Sweet child, when by me now thy dear foot trod,
I knew thee for the loved one of our god ;
Then prithee take my counsel in good part ;
Go to the shore again, and rest thine heart
In sleep awhile, until the sun get low,
And then across the river shalt thou go
And find these evil creatures sleeping fast,
And on the bushes whereby they have passed
Much golden wool ; take what seems good to thee,
And ere the sun sets go back easily.
But if within that mead thou sett'st thy feet
While yet they wake, an ill death shalt thou meet,
For they are of a cursed man-hating race,
Bred by a giant in a lightless place.”

But at these words soft tears filled Psyche's eyes
As hope of love within her heart did rise ;
And when she saw she was not helpless yet
Her old desire she would not quite forget ;
But turning back, upon the bank she lay
In happy dreams till nigh the end of day ;
Then did she cross and gather of the wool,
And with her bosom and her gown-skirt full
Came back to Venus at the sun-setting ;
But she afar off saw it glistening
And cried aloud, “Go, take the slave away,
And keep her safe for yet another day,
And on the morning will I think again
Of some fresh task, since with so little pain

CUPID AND PSYCHE

She doeth what the gods find hard enow ;
For since the winds were pleased this waif to blow
Unto my door, a fool I were indeed,
If I should fail to use her for my need."

So her they led away from that bright sun,
Now scarce more hopeful that the task was done,
Since by those bitter words she knew full well
Another tale the coming day would tell.

But the next morn upon a turret high,
Where the wind kissed her raiment lovingly,
Stood Venus waiting her ; and when she came
She said, " O slave, thy city's very shame,
Lift up thy cunning eyes, and looking hence
Shalt thou behold betwixt these battlements,
A black and barren mountain set aloof
From the green hills, shaped like a palace roof.
Ten leagues from hence it lieth, toward the north,
And from its rocks a fountain wellet forth,
Black like itself, and floweth down its side,
And in a while part into Styx doth glide,
And part into Cocytus runs away ;
Now coming thither by the end of day,
Fill me this ewer from out the awful stream ;
Such task a sorceress like thee will deem
A little matter ; bring it not to pass,
And if thou be not made of steel or brass,
To-morrow shalt thou find the bitterest day
Thou yet hast known, and all be sport and play
To what thy heart in that hour shall endure—
Behold, I swear it, and my word is sure ! "

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

She turned therewith to go down toward the sea,
To meet her lover, who from Thessaly
Was come from some well-foughten field of war.

But Psyche, wandering wearily afar,
Reached the bare foot of that black rock at last,
And sat there grieving for the happy past,
For surely now, she thought, no help could be,
She had but reached the final misery,
Nor had she any counsel but to weep.

For not alone the place was very steep,
And craggy beyond measure, but she knew :
What well it was that she was driven to,
The dreadful water that the gods swear by,
For there on either hand, as one draws nigh,
Are long-necked dragons ready for the spring,
And many another monstrous nameless thing,
The very sight of which is well-nigh death ;
Then the black water as it goes crieth,
“Fly, wretched one, before you come to die !
Die, wretched man ! I will not let you fly !
How have you heart to come before me here ?
You have no heart, your life is turned to fear !”
Till the wretch falls adown with whirling brain,
And far below the sharp rocks end his pain.

Well then might Psyche wail her wretched fate
And strive no more, but sitting weep and wait
Alone in that black land for kindly death,
With weary sobbing, wasting life and breath ;
But o'er her head there flew the bird of Jove,
The bearer of his servant, friend of Love,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Who, when he saw her, straightway towards her flew,
And asked her why she wept, and when he knew,
And who she was, he said, "Cease all thy fear,
For to the black waves I thy ewer will bear,
And fill it for thee; but, remember me,
When thou art come unto thy majesty."

Then straight he flew, and through the dragons' wings
Went carelessly, nor feared their clatterings,
But set the ewer, filled, in her right hand,
And on that day saw many another land.

Then Psyche through the night toiled back again,
And as she went, she thought, "Ah! all is vain,
For though once more I just escape indeed,
Yet hath she many another wile at need;
And to these days when I my life first learn,
With unavailing longing shall I turn,
When this that seemeth now so horrible
Shall then seem but the threshold of her hell.
Alas! what shall I do? for even now
In sleep I see her pitiless white brow,
And hear the dreadful sound of her commands,
While with my helpless body and bound hands
I tremble underneath the cruel whips;
And oft for dread of her, with quivering lips
I wake, and waking know the time draws nigh
When nought shall wake me from that misery—
Behold, O Love, because of thee I live,
Because of thee, with these things still I strive."

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

NOW with the risen sun her weary feet
The late-strewn roses of the floor did meet
Upon the marble threshold of the place ;
But she being brought before the matchless face,
Fresh with the new life of another day,
Beheld her wondering, for the goddess lay
With half-shut eyes upon her golden bed,
And when she entered scarcely turned her head,
But smiling spake, " The gods are good to thee,
Nor shalt thou always be mine enemy ;
But one more task I charge thee with to-day,
Now unto Proserpine take thou thy way,
And give this golden casket to her hands,
And pray the fair Queen of the gloomy lands
To fill the void shell with that beauty rare
That long ago as queen did set her there ;
Nor needest thou to fail in this new thing,
Who hast to-day the heart and wit to bring
This dreadful water, and return alive ;
And, that thou may'st the more in this thing strive,
If thou returnest I will show at last
My kindness unto thee, and all the past
Shalt thou remember as an ugly dream."

And now at first to Psyche did it seem
Her heart was softening to her, and the thought
Swelled her full heart to sobbing, and it brought
Into her yearning eyes half-happy tears :

CUPID AND PSYCHE

But on her way cold thoughts and dreadful fears
Rose in her heart, for who indeed could teach
A living soul that dread abode to reach
And yet return? and then once more it seemed
The hope of mercy was but lightly dreamed,
And she remembered that triumphant smile,
And needs must think, "This is the final wile.
Alas! what trouble must a goddess take
So weak a thing as this poor heart to break.

"See now this tower! from off its top will I
Go quick to Proserpine—ah, good to die!
Rather than hear those shameful words again,
And bear that unimaginable pain
Which she has hoarded for to-morrow morn;
Now is the ending of my life forlorn!
O Love, farewell, thou seest all hope is dead,
Thou seest what torments on my wretched head
Thy bitter mother doth not cease to heap;
Farewell, O Love, for thee and life I weep.
Alas, my foolish heart! alas, my sin!
Alas, for all the love I could not win!"

Now was this tower both old enough and grey,
Built by some king forgotten many a day,
And no man dwelt there, now that bitter war
From that bright land had long been driven afar;
There now she entered, trembling and afraid;
But 'neath her doubtful steps the dust long laid
In utter rest, rose up into the air,
And wavered in the wind that down the stair
Rushed to the door; then she drew back a pace,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Moved by the coolness of the lonely place
That for so long had seen no ray of sun.

Then shuddering did she hear these words begun,
Like a wind's moaning voice, "Have thou no fear
The hollow words of one long slain to hear!
Thou livest, and thy hope is not yet dead,
And if thou heedest me, thou well may'st tread
The road to hell, and yet return again.

"For thou must go o'er many a hill and plain
Until to Sparta thou art come at last,
And when the ancient city thou hast passed
A mountain shalt thou reach, that men now call
Mount Tænarus, that riseth like a wall
'Twixt plain and upland, therein shalt thou find
The wide mouth of a cavern huge and blind,
Wherein there cometh never any sun,
Whose dreadful darkness all things living shun;
This shun thou not, but yet take care to have
Three honey-cakes thy soul alive to save,
And in thy mouth a piece of money set,
Then through the dark go boldly, and forget
The stories thou hast heard of death and hell,
And heed my words, and then shall all be well.

"For when thou hast passed through that cavern blind,
A place of dim grey meadows shalt thou find,
Wherethrough to inmost hell a path doth lead,
Which follow thou, with diligence and heed;
For as thou goest there, thou soon shalt see
Two men like peasants loading painfully
A fallen ass; these unto thee will call
To help them, but give thou no heed at all,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

But pass them swiftly ; and then soon again
Within a shed three crones shalt thou see plain
Busily weaving, who shall bid thee leave
The road and fill their shuttles while they weave.
But slacken not thy steps for all their prayers,
For these are shadows only, and set snares.

“At last thou comest to a water wan,
And at the bank shall be the ferryman
Surly and grey ; and when he asketh thee
Of money for thy passage, hastily
Show him thy mouth, and straight from off thy lip
The money he will take, and in his ship
Embark thee and set forward ; but beware,
For on thy passage is another snare ;
From out the waves a grisly head shall come,
Most like thy father thou hast left at home,
And pray for passage long and piteously,
But on thy life of him have no pity,
Else art thou lost ; also thy father lives,
And in the temples of the high gods gives
Great daily gifts for thy returning home.

“When thou unto the other side art come,
A palace shalt thou see of fiery gold,
And by the door thereof shalt thou behold
An ugly triple monster, that shall yell
For thine undoing ; now behold him well,
And into each mouth of him cast a cake,
And no more heed of thee then shall he take,
And thou may'st pass into a glorious hall
Where many a wonder hangs upon the wall ;
But far more wonderful than anything

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

The fair slim consort of the gloomy King,
Arrayed all royally shalt thou behold,
Who sitting on a carven throne of gold,
Whene'er thou enterest shall rise up to thee,
And bid thee welcome there most lovingly,
And pray thee on a royal bed to sit,
And share her feast ; yet eat thou not of it,
But sitting on the ground eat bread alone,
Then do thy message kneeling by her throne ;
And when thou hast the gift, return with speed ;
The sleepy dog of thee shall take no heed,
The ferryman shall bear thee on thy way
Without more words, and thou shalt see the day
Unharm'd if that dread box thou openest not ;
But if thou dost, then death shall be thy lot.

“O beautiful, when safe thou com'st again,
Remember me, who lie here in such pain
Unburied ; set me in some tomb of stone,
When thou hast gathered every little bone ;
But never shalt thou set thereon a name,
Because my ending was with grief and shame,
Who was a Queen like thee long years ago,
And in this tower so long have lain alone.”

Then, pale and full of trouble, Psyche went
Bearing the casket, and her footsteps bent
To Lacedæmon, and thence found her way
To Tænarus, and there the golden day
For that dark cavern did she leave behind ;
Then, going boldly through it, did she find

CUPID AND PSYCHE

The shadowy meads which that wide way ran through,
Under a seeming sky 'twixt grey and blue ;
No wind blew there, there was no bird or tree,
Or beast, and dim grey flowers she did but see
That never faded in that changeless place,
And if she had but seen a living face
Most strange and bright she would have thought it there,
Or if her own face, troubled yet so fair,
The still pools by the road-side could have shown
The dimness of that place she might have known ;
But their dull surface cast no image back,
For all but dreams of light that land did lack.

So on she passed, still noting every thing,
Nor yet had she forgotten there to bring
The honey-cakes and money : in a while
She saw those shadows striving hard to pile
The bales upon the ass, and heard them call,
" O woman, help us ! for our skill is small
And we are feeble in this place indeed ; "
But swiftly did she pass, nor gave them heed,
Though after her from far their cries they sent.

Then a long way adown that road she went,
Not seeing aught, till, as the Shade had said,
She came upon three women in a shed
Busily weaving, who cried, " Daughter, leave
The beaten road a while, and as we weave
Fill thou our shuttles with these endless threads,
For here our eyes are sleepy, and our heads
Are feeble in this miserable place."
But for their words she did but mend her pace,
Although her heart beat quick as she passed by.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then on she went, until she could espy
The wan, grey river lap the leaden bank
Wherefrom there sprouted sparsely sedges rank,
And there the road had end in that sad boat
Wherein the dead men unto Minos float ;
There stood the ferryman, who now, seeing her, said,
“ O living soul, that thus among the dead
Hast come, on whatso errand, without fear,
Know thou that penniless none passes here ;
Of all the coins that rich men have on earth
To buy the dreadful folly they call mirth,
But one they keep when they have passed the grave
That o’er this stream a passage they may have ;
And thou, though living, art but dead to me,
Who here, immortal, see mortality
Pass, stripped of this last thing that men desire
Unto the changeless meads or changeless fire.”

Speechless she shewed the money on her lip
Which straight he took, and set her in the ship,
And then the wretched, heavy oars he threw
Into the rowlocks and the flood they drew ;
Silent, with eyes that looked beyond her face,
He laboured, and they left the dreary place.

But midmost of that water did arise
A dead man, pale, with ghastly staring eyes
That somewhat like her father still did seem,
But in such wise as figures in a dream ;
Then with a lamentable voice it cried,
“ O daughter, I am dead, and in this tide
For ever shall I drift, an unnamed thing,
Who was thy father once, a mighty king,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Unless thou take some pity on me now,
And bid the ferryman turn here his prow,
That I with thee to some abode may cross;
And little unto thee will be the loss,
And unto me the gain will be to come
To such a place as I may call a home,
Being now but dead and empty of delight,
And set in this sad place 'twixt dark and light."

Now at these words the tears ran down apace
For memory of the once familiar face,
And those old days, wherein, a little child
'Twixt awe and love beneath those eyes she smiled;
False pity moved her very heart, although
The guile of Venus she failed not to know,
But tighter round the casket clasped her hands,
And shut her eyes, remembering the commands
Of that dead queen: so safe to land she came.

And there in that grey country, like a flame
Before her eyes rose up the house of gold,
And at the gate she met the beast threefold,
Who ran to meet her open-mouthed, but she
Unto his jaws the cakes cast cunningly,
But trembling much; then on the ground he lay
Lolling his heads, and let her go her way;
And so she came into the mighty hall,
And saw those wonders hanging on the wall,
That all with pomegranates was covered o'er
In memory of the meal on that sad shore,
Whereby fair Enna was bewept in vain,
And this became a kingdom and a chain.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But on a throne, the Queen of all the dead
She saw therein with gold-embracéd head,
In royal raiment, beautiful and pale ;
Then with slim hands her face did Psyche veil
In worship of her, who said, " Welcome here,
O messenger of Venus ! thou art dear
To me thyself indeed, for of thy grace
And loveliness we know e'en in this place ;
Rest thee then, fair one, on this royal bed
And with some dainty food shalt thou be fed ;
Ho, ye who wait, bring in the tables now ! "

Therewith were brought things glorious of show
On cloths and tables royally beseen,
By damsels each one fairer than a queen,
The very latchets of whose shoes were worth
The royal crown of any queen on earth ;
But when upon them Psyche looked, she saw
That all these dainty matters without flaw
Were strange of shape and of strange-blended hues ;
So every cup and plate did she refuse
Those lovely hands brought to her, and she said,
" O Queen, to me amidst my awe and dread
These things are nought, my message is not done,
So let me rest upon this cold grey stone,
And while my eyes no higher than thy feet
Are lifted, eat the food that mortals eat. "

Therewith upon the floor she sat her down
And from the folded bosom of her gown
Drew forth her bread and ate, while with cold eyes
Regarding her 'twixt anger and surprise,
The Queen sat silent for awhile, then spoke,

CUPID AND PSYCHE

“Why art thou here, wisest of living folk?
Depart in haste, lest thou shouldst come to be
Thyself a helpless thing and shadowy!
Give me the casket then, thou need'st not say
Wherefore thou thus hast passed the awful way;
Bide there, and for thy mistress shalt thou have
The charm that beauty from all change can save.”

Then Psyche rose, and from her trembling hand
Gave her the casket, and awhile did stand
Alone within the hall, that changing light
From burning streams, and shadowy waves of night
Made strange and dread, till to her, standing there
The world began to seem no longer fair,
Life no more to be hoped for, but that place
The peaceful goal of all the hurrying race,
The house she must return to on some day.

Then sighing scarcely could she turn away
When with the casket came the Queen once more,
And said, “Haste now to leave this shadowy shore
Before thou changest; even now I see
Thine eyes are growing strange, thou look'st on me
E'en as the linnet looks upon the snake.
Behold, thy wisely-guarded treasure take,
And let thy breath of life no longer move
The shadows with the memories of past love.”

But Psyche at that name, with quickened heart
Turned eagerly, and hastened to depart
Bearing that burden, hoping for the day;
Harmless, asleep, the triple monster lay,
The ferryman did set her in his boat

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Unquestioned, and together did they float
Over the leaden water back again :
Nor saw she more those women bent with pain
Over their weaving, nor the fallen ass,
But swiftly up the grey road did she pass
And well-nigh now was come into the day
By hollow Tænarus, but o'er the way
The wings of Envy brooded all unseen ;
Because indeed the cruel and fair Queen
Knew well how she had sped ; so in her breast,
Against the which the dreadful box was pressed,
Grew up at last this foolish, harmful thought.

“Behold how far this beauty I have brought
To give unto my bitter enemy ;
Might I not still a very goddess be
If this were mine which goddesses desire ;
Yea, what if this hold swift consuming fire,
Why do I think it good for me to live,
That I my body once again may give
Into her cruel hands—come death ! come life !
And give me end to all the bitter strife !”

Therewith down by the wayside did she sit
And turned the box round, long regarding it ;
But at the last, with trembling hands, undid
The clasp, and fearfully raised up the lid ;
But what was there she saw not, for her head
Fell back, and nothing she remembered
Of all her life, yet nought of rest she had,
The hope of which makes hapless mortals glad ;
For while her limbs were sunk in deadly sleep
Most like to death, over her heart 'gan creep

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Ill dreams ; so that for fear and great distress
She would have cried, but in her helplessness
Could open not her mouth, or frame a word ;
Although the threats of mocking things she heard,
And seemed, amidst new forms of horror bound,
To watch strange endless armies moving round,
With all their sleepless eyes still fixed on her,
Who from that changeless place should never stir.
Moveless she lay, and in that dreadful sleep
Scarce had the strength some few slow tears to weep.

And there she would have lain for evermore,
A marble image on the shadowy shore
In outward seeming, but within oppressed
With torments, knowing neither hope nor rest,
But as she lay the Phoenix flew along
Going to Egypt, and knew all her wrong,
And pitied her, beholding her sweet face,
And flew to Love and told him of her case ;
And Love, in guerdon of the tale he told,
Changed all the feathers of his neck to gold,
And he flew on to Egypt glad at heart.
But Love himself gat swiftly for his part
To rocky Tænarus, and found her there
Laid half a furlong from the outer air.

But at that sight out burst the smothered flame
Of love, when he remembered all her shame,
The stripes, the labour, and the wretched fear,
And kneeling down he whispered in her ear,
“ Rise, Psyche, and be mine for evermore,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

For evil is long tarrying on this shore.”
Then when she heard him, straightway she arose,
And from her fell the burden of her woes ;
And yet her heart within her well-nigh broke,
When she from grief to happiness awoke ;
And loud her sobbing was in that grey place,
And with sweet shame she covered up her face.

But her dear hands, all wet with tears, he kissed,
And taking them about each dainty wrist
Drew them away, and in a sweet voice said,
“Raise up again, O Psyche, that dear head,
And of thy simpleness have no more shame ;
Thou hast been tried, and cast away all blame
Into the sea of woes that thou didst bear,
The bitter pain, the hopelessness, the fear—
Holpen a little, loved with boundless love
Amidst them all—but now the shadows move
Fast toward the west, earth’s day is well-nigh done,
One toil thou hast yet ; by to-morrow’s sun
Kneel the last time before my mother’s feet,
Thy task accomplished ; and my heart, O sweet,
Shall go with thee to ease thy toilsome way :
Farewell awhile ! but that so glorious day
I promised thee of old, now cometh fast,
When even hope thy soul aside shall cast,
Amidst the joy that thou shalt surely win.”

So saying, all that sleep he shut within
The dreadful casket, and aloft he flew,
But slowly she unto the cavern drew
Scarce knowing if she dreamed, and so she came
Unto the earth where yet the sun did flame

CUPID AND PSYCHE

Low down between the pine-trunks, tall and red,
And with its last beams kissed her golden head.

WITH what words Love unto the Father prayed
I know not, nor what deeds the balance weighed;
But this I know, that he prayed not in vain,
And Psyche's life the heavenly crown shall gain;
So round about the messenger was sent
To tell immortals of their King's intent,
And bid them gather to the Father's hall.

But while they got them ready at his call,
On through the night was Psyche toiling still,
To whom no pain nor weariness seemed ill
Since now once more she knew herself beloved;
But when the unresting world again had moved
Round into golden day, she came again
To that fair place where she had borne such pain,
And flushed and joyful in despite her fear,
Unto the goddess did she draw anear,
And knelt adown before her golden seat,
Laying the fatal casket at her feet;
Then at the first no word the Sea-born said,
But looked afar over her golden head,
Pondering upon the mighty deeds of fate;
While Psyche still, as one who well may wait,
Knelt, calm and motionless, nor said a word,
But ever thought of her sweet lovesome lord.

At last the Queen said, "Girl, I bid thee rise,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

For now hast thou found favour in mine eyes ;
And I repent me of the misery
That in this place thou hast endured of me,
Although because of it, thy joy indeed
Shall now be more, that pleasure is thy meed."

Then bending, on the forehead did she kiss
Fair Psyche, who turned red for shame and bliss ;
But Venus smiled again on her, and said,
"Go now, and bathe, and be as well arrayed
As thou shouldst be, to sit beside my son ;
I think thy life on earth is well-nigh done."

So thence once more was Psyche led away,
And cast into no prison on that day,
But brought unto a bath beset with flowers,
Made dainty with a fount's sweet-smelling showers,
And there being bathed, e'en in such fair attire
As veils the glorious Mother of Desire
Her limbs were veiled, then in the wavering shade,
Amidst the sweetest garden was she laid,
And while the damsels round her watch did keep,
At last she closed her weary eyes in sleep,
And woke no more to earth, for ere the day
Had yet grown late, once more asleep she lay
Within the West Wind's mighty arms, nor woke
Until the light of heaven upon her broke,
And on her trembling lips she felt the kiss
Of very Love, and mortal yet, for bliss
Must fall a-weeping. O for me ! that I,
Who late have told her woe and misery,
Must leave untold the joy unspeakable

CUPID AND PSYCHE

That on her tender wounded spirit fell !
Alas ! I try to think of it in vain,
My lyre is but attuned to tears and pain,
How shall I sing the never-ending day ?

Led by the hand of Love she took her way
Unto a vale beset with heavenly trees,
Where all the gathered gods and goddesses
Abode her coming ; but when Psyche saw
The Father's face, she fainting with her awe
Had fallen, but that Love's arm held her up.

Then brought the cup-bearer a golden cup,
And gently set it in her slender hand,
And while in dread and wonder she did stand,
The Father's awful voice smote on her ear,
"Drink now, O beautiful, and have no fear !
For with this draught shalt thou be born again,
And live for ever free from care and pain."

Then, pale as privet, took she heart to drink,
And therewithal most strange new thoughts did think,
And unknown feelings seized her, and there came
Sudden remembrance, vivid as a flame,
Of everything that she had done on earth,
Although it all seemed changed in weight and worth,
Small things becoming great, and great things small ;
And godlike pity touched her therewithal
For her old self, for sons of men that die ;
And that sweet new-born immortality
Now with full love her rested spirit fed.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then in that concourse did she lift her head,
And stood at last a very goddess there,
And all cried out at seeing her grown so fair.

So while in heaven quick passed the time away,
About the ending of that lovely day,
Bright shone the low sun over all the earth
For joy of such a wonderful new birth.

MAY

OR e'er his tale was done, night held the earth ;
Yea, the brown bird grown bold, as sounds of mirth
Grew faint and scanty, now his tale had done,
And by his mate abode the next day's sun ;
And in those old hearts did the story move
Remembrance of the mighty deeds of love,
And with these thoughts did hopes of life arise,
Till tears unseen were in their ancient eyes,
And in their yearning hearts unspoken prayers,
And idle seemed the world with all its cares.

Few words they said ; the balmy odorous wind
Wandered about, some resting-place to find ;
The young leaves rustled 'neath its gentle breath,
And here and there some blossom burst his sheath,
Adding unnoticed fragrance to the night ;
But, as they pondered, a new golden light
Streamed over the green garden, and they heard
Sweet voices sing some ancient poet's word
In praise of May, and then in sight there came
The minstrels' figures underneath the flame
Of scented torches passing 'twixt the trees,
And soon the dusky hall grew bright with these,
And therewithal they put all thought away,
And midst the tinkling harps drank deep to May.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

THROUGH many changes had the May-tide passed,
The hope of summer oft had been o'ercast,
Ere midst the gardens they once more were met ;
But now the full-leaved trees might well forget
The changeful agony of doubtful spring,
For summer pregnant with so many a thing
Was at the door ; right hot had been the day
Which they amid the trees had passed away,
And now betwixt the tulip beds they went
Unto the hall, and thoughts of days long spent
Gathered about them, as some blossom's smell
Unto their hearts familiar tales did tell.

But when they well were settled in the hall,
And now behind the trees the sun 'gan fall,
And they as yet no history had heard,
Laurence, the Swabian priest, took up the word,
And said, "Ye know from what has gone before,
That in my youth I followed mystic lore,
And many books I read in seeking it,
And through my memory this same eve doth flit
A certain tale I found in one of these,
Long ere mine eyes had looked upon the seas ;
It made me shudder in the times gone by,
When I believed in many a mystery
I thought divine, that now I think, forsooth,

MAY

Men's own fears made, to fill the place of truth
Within their foolish hearts ; short is the tale,
And therefore will the better now avail
To fill the space before the night comes on,
And unto rest once more the world is won.

THE WRITING ON THE IMAGE

ARGUMENT

HOW on an image that stood anciently in Rome were written certain words, which none understood, until a Scholar, coming there, knew their meaning, and thereby discovered great marvels, but withal died miserably.

IN half-forgotten days of old,
As by our fathers we were told,
Within the town of Rome there stood
An image cut of cornel wood,
And on the upraised hand of it
Men might behold these letters writ :
"PERCUTE HIC : " which is to say,
In that tongue that we speak to-day,
"*Strike here !*" nor yet did any know
The cause why this was written so.

Thus in the middle of the square,
In the hot sun and summer air,
The snow-drift and the driving rain,
That image stood, with little pain,
For twice a hundred years and ten ;
While many a band of striving men
Were driven betwixt woe and mirth

THE WRITING ON THE IMAGE

Swiftly across the weary earth,
From nothing unto dark nothing :
And many an emperor and king,
Passing with glory or with shame,
Left little record of his name,
And no remembrance of the face
Once watched with awe for gifts or grace.

Fear little, then, I counsel you,
What any son of man can do ;
Because a log of wood will last
While many a life of man goes past,
And all is over in short space.

Now so it chanced that to this place
There came a man of Sicily,
Who when the image he did see,
Knew full well who, in days of yore,
Had set it there ; for much strange lore,
In Egypt and in Babylon,
This man with painful toil had won ;
And many secret things could do ;
So verily full well he knew
That master of all sorcery
Who wrought the thing in days gone by,
And doubted not that some great spell
It guarded, but could nowise tell
What it might be. So, day by day,
Still would he loiter on the way,
And watch the image carefully,
Well mocked of many a passer-by.

And on a day he stood and gazed

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Upon the slender finger, raised
Against a doubtful cloudy sky,
Nigh noontide ; and thought, " Certainly
The master who made thee so fair
By wondrous art, had not stopped there,
But made thee speak, had he not thought
That thereby evil might be brought
Upon his spell." But as he spoke,
From out a cloud the noon sun broke
With watery light, and shadows cold :
Then did the Scholar well behold
How, from that finger carved to tell
Those words, a short black shadow fell
Upon a certain spot of ground,
And thereon, looking all around
And seeing none heeding, went straightway
Whereas the finger's shadow lay,
And with his knife about the place
A little circle did he trace ;
Then home he turned with throbbing head,
And forthright gat him to his bed,
And slept until the night was late
And few men stirred from gate to gate.
So when at midnight he did wake,
Pickaxe and shovel did he take,
And, going to that now silent square,
He found the mark his knife made there,
And quietly with many a stroke
The pavement of the place he broke :
And so, the stones being set apart,
He 'gan to dig with beating heart,

THE WRITING ON THE IMAGE

And from the hole in haste he cast
The marl and gravel ; till at last,
Full shoulder high, his arms were jarred,
For suddenly his spade struck hard
With clang against some metal thing :
And soon he found a brazen ring,
All green with rust, twisted, and great
As a man's wrist, set in a plate
Of copper, wrought all curiously
With words unknown though plain to see,
Spite of the rust ; and flowering trees,
And beasts, and wicked images,
Whereat he shuddered : for he knew
What ill things he might come to do,
If he should still take part with these
And that Great Master strive to please.

But small time had he then to stand
And think, so straight he set his hand
Unto the ring, but where he thought
That by main strength it must be brought
From out its place, lo ! easily
It came away, and let him see
A winding staircase wrought of stone,
Wherethrough the new-come wind did moan.

Then thought he, " If I come alive
From out this place well shall I thrive,
For I may look here certainly
The treasures of a king to see,
A mightier man than men are now.
So in few days what man shall know
The needy Scholar, seeing me

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Great in the place where great men be,
The richest man in all the land ?
Beside the best then shall I stand,
And some unheard-of palace have ;
And if my soul I may not save
In heaven, yet here in all men's eyes
Will I make some sweet paradise,
With marble cloisters, and with trees
And bubbling wells, and fantasies,
And things all men deem strange and rare,
And crowds of women kind and fair,
That I may see, if so I please,
Laid on the flowers, or mid the trees
With half-clad bodies wandering.
There, dwelling happier than the king,
What lovely days may yet be mine !
How shall I live with love and wine,
And music, till I come to die !
And then——Who knoweth certainly
What haps to us when we are dead ?
Truly I think by likelihead
Nought haps to us of good or bad ;
Therefore on earth will I be glad
A short space, free from hope or fear ;
And fearless will I enter here
And meet my fate, whatso it be."

Now on his back a bag had he,
To bear what treasure he might win,
And therewith now did he begin
To go adown the winding stair ;

THE WRITING ON THE IMAGE

And found the walls all painted fair
With images of many a thing,
Warrior and priest, and queen and king,
But nothing knew what they might be.
Which things full clearly could he see,
For lamps were hung up here and there
Of strange device, but wrought right fair,
And pleasant savour came from them.

At last a curtain, on whose hem
Unknown words in red gold were writ,
He reached, and softly raising it
Stepped back, for now did he behold
A goodly hall hung round with gold,
And at the upper end could see
Sitting, a glorious company :
Therefore he trembled, thinking well
They were no men, but fiends of hell.
But while he waited, trembling sore,
And doubtful of his late-learned lore,
A cold blast of the outer air
Blew out the lamps upon the stair
And all was dark behind him ; then
Did he fear less to face those men
Than, turning round, to leave them there
While he went groping up the stair.
Yea, since he heard no cry or call
Or any speech from them at all,
He doubted they were images
Set there some dying king to please
By that Great Master of the art ;
Therefore at last with stouter heart

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

He raised the cloth and entered in
In hope that happy life to win,
And drawing nigher did behold
That these were bodies dead and cold
Attiréd in full royal guise,
And wrought by art in such a wise
That living they all seemed to be,
Whose very eyes he well could see,
That now beheld not foul or fair,
Shining as though alive they were.
And midmost of that company
An ancient king that man could see,
A mighty man, whose beard of grey
A foot over his gold gown lay ;
And next beside him sat his queen
Who in a flowery gown of green
And golden mantle well was clad,
And on her neck a collar had
Too heavy for her dainty breast ;
Her loins by such a belt were prest
That whoso in his treasury
Held that alone, a king might be.
On either side of these, a lord
Stood heedfully before the board,
And in their hands held bread and wine
For service ; behind these did shine
The armour of the guards, and then
The well-attiréd serving-men,
The minstrels clad in raiment meet ;
And over against the royal seat
Was hung a lamp, although no flame

THE WRITING ON THE IMAGE

Was burning there, but there was set
Within its open golden fret
A huge carbuncle, red and bright;
Wherefrom there shone forth such a light
That great hall was as clear by it,
As though by wax it had been lit,
As some great church at Easter-tide.

Now set a little way aside,
Six paces from the dais stood
An image made of brass and wood,
In likeness of a full-armed knight
Who pointed 'gainst the ruddy light
A huge shaft ready in a bow.

Pondering how he could come to know
What all these marvellous matters meant,
About the hall the Scholar went,
Trembling, though nothing moved as yet;
And for awhile did he forget
The longings that had brought him there
In wondering at these marvels fair;
And still for fear he doubted much
One jewel of their robes to touch.

But as about the hall he passed
He grew more used to them at last,
And thought, "Swiftly the time goes by,
And now no doubt the day draws nigh.
Folk will be stirring: by my head,
A fool I am to fear the dead,
Who have seen living things enow,
Whose very names no man can know,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Whose shapes brave men might well affright
More than the lion in the night
Wandering for food ; ” therewith he drew
Unto those royal corpses two,
That on dead brows still wore the crown ;
And midst the golden cups set down
The rugged wallet from his back,
Patched of strong leather, brown and black.
Then, opening wide its mouth, took up
From off the board, a golden cup
The King’s dead hand was laid upon,
Whose unmoved eyes upon him shone
And recked no more of that last shame
Than if he were the beggar lame,
Who in old days was wont to wait
For a dog’s meal beside the gate.

Of which shame nought our man did reck,
But laid his hand upon the neck
Of the slim Queen, and thence undid
The jewelled collar, that straight slid
Down her smooth bosom to the board.
And when these matters he had stored
Safe in his sack, with both their crowns,
The jewelled parts of their rich gowns,
Their shoes and belts, brooches and rings,
And cleared the board of all rich things,
He staggered with them down the hall.
But as he went his eyes did fall
Upon a wonderful green stone,
Upon the hall-floor laid alone ;
He said, “ Though thou art not so great

THE WRITING ON THE IMAGE

To add by much unto the weight
Of this my sack indeed, yet thou,
Certes, would make me rich enow,
That verily with thee I might
Wage one-half of the world to fight
The other half of it, and I
The lord of all the world might die;—
I will not leave thee;" therewithal
He knelt down midmost of the hall,
Thinking it would come easily
Into his hand; but when that he
Gat hold of it, full fast it stack,
So fuming, down he laid his sack,
And with both hands pulled lustily,
But as he strained, he cast his eye
Back to the daïs; there he saw
The bowman image 'gin to draw
The mighty bowstring to his ear,
So, shrieking out aloud for fear,
Of that rich stone he loosed his hold
And catching up his bag of gold,
Gat to his feet: but ere he stood
The evil thing of brass and wood
Up to his ear the notches drew;
And clanging, forth the arrow flew,
And midmost of the carbuncle
Clanging again, the forked barbs fell,
And all was dark as pitch straightway.

So there until the judgment day
Shall come and find his bones laid low

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And raise them up for weal or woe,
This man must bide ; cast down he lay
While all his past life day by day
In one short moment he could see
Drawn out before him, while that he
In terror by that fatal stone
Was laid, and scarcely dared to moan.
But in a while his hope returned,
And then, though nothing he discerned,
He gat him up upon his feet,
And all about the walls he beat
To find some token of the door,
But never could he find it more,
For by some dreadful sorcery
All was sealed close as it might be,
And midst the marvels of that hall
This Scholar found the end of all.

But in the town on that same night,
An hour before the dawn of light,
Such storm upon the place there fell,
That not the oldest man could tell
Of such another : and thereby
The image was burnt utterly,
Being stricken from the clouds above ;
And folk deemed that same bolt did move
The pavement where that wretched one
Unto his foredoomed fate had gone,
Because the plate was set again
Into its place, and the great rain
Washed the earth down, and sorcery

THE WRITING ON THE IMAGE

Had hid the place where it did lie.

So soon the stones were set all straight,

But yet the folk, afraid of fate,

Where once the man of cornel wood

Through many a year of bad and good

Had kept his place, set up alone

Great Jove himself, cut in white stone,

But thickly overlaid with gold.

“Which,” saith my tale, “you may behold

Unto this day, although indeed

Some Lord or other, being in need,

Took every ounce of gold away.”

But now, this tale in some past day

Being writ, I warrant all is gone,

Both gold and weather-beaten stone.

Be merry, masters, while ye may,

For men much quicker pass away.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

THEY praised the tale, and for awhile they talked
Of other tales of treasure-seekers balked,
And shame and loss for men insatiate stored,
Nitocris' tomb, the Niblungs' fatal hoard,
The serpent-guarded treasures of the dead ;
Then of how men would be remembered
When they are gone ; and more than one could tell
Of what unhappy things therefrom befell ;
Or how by folly men have gained a name ;
A name indeed, not hallowed by the fame
Of any deeds remembered : and some thought,—
“Strange hopes and fears for what shall be but nought
To dead men ! better it would be to give
What things they may, while on the earth they live,
Unto the earth, and from the bounteous earth
To take their pay of sorrow or of mirth,
Hatred or love, and get them on their way ;
And let the teeming earth fresh troubles make
For other men, and ever for their sake
Use what they left, when they are gone from it.”

But while amid such musings they did sit,
Dark night being come, men lighted up the hall,
And the chief man for minstrelsy did call,
And other talk their dull thoughts chased away,
Nor did they part till night was mixed with day.